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92
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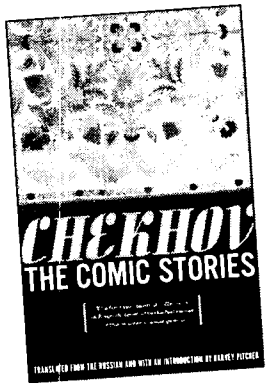

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Editor's Page

"PLEASE LEAVE your threat after you hear the beep." This was the message on Slobodan Milosevic's answering machine as rendered by a French cartoonist back when Bosnia was being "ethnically cleansed." The sorry point of this witticism finally became moot with NATO's attack on Serbia this past spring—just as Belgrade readied to do to Kosovar Muslims what it had done elsewhere. ■ "Ethnic cleansing" trumps a lot of other considerations, at least for some of us on the left. Yet it is vexing (for me, anyway) to find part of the left more agitated about any use of American force than about a profoundly menaced population—and speaking as if there is nothing Milosevic could do that is not the fault of Washington. This is the internationalism of fools. Yes, there is always the caveat: "We don't like Milosevic either, but there are so many like him around." But not all bad guys and bad acts are the same; assimilate them all into the wickedness of the world and you merely relieve yourself of tough moral choices. ■ Here's a hard call: can you favor an action though you are suspicious of the actor? If you have a complex worldview, the answer must—sometimes—be "yes." After all, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, Hanoi broke international laws, violated its neighbor's sovereignty, and did so for self-interested and not humanitarian reasons. A good thing? Yes. It ended the murderous reign of the Khmer Rouge; the rest is secondary. ■ The left is leery of the use of American power for very good reasons. We have seen its abuse a little too often in this half of the century. Doubt, however, can be deployed intelligently—or simplistically. ■ President Clinton has provided ample cause for doubt. How, one wonders, would this president respond to Michael Walzer's query: "Are countries with armies whose soldiers cannot be put at risk morally or politically qualified to intervene?" The Third Way in war seems as slippery as it is in domestic policy. ■ Even if the official aims of the war are just, it has been conducted in a morally ambiguous way by an organization—NATO—that has been more in a rush to increase its members than to define its post–cold war purpose. Bush's Gulf War slogan was a "New World Order," but no such thing exists. Instead, there is still post–cold war flux. Clinton furnishes no coherent vision of America's role in this world—except when it comes to economic globalization, where the "Washington Consensus" continues Bush's "free" market fundamentalism. (James K. Galbraith dissects this consensus in our Brave New Globe series). Not that the Republicans are better. Some support the NATO intervention, some waffle on it, but at least their right wing has invented something original: anti-interventionists for huge defense budgets. Incoherent Republican foreign policy has its counterpart in a bankrupt—though zealously pursued—domestic agenda, which Sean Wilentz scrutinizes. ■ Look back at copies of *Dissent* during and after the Gulf War, and you will find a wide range of views, pro and con, all argued from left-wing premises. We will pursue the same pluralism now, beginning with James B. Rule's vigorous criticisms of left support of American commitments abroad.

M.C.

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Dissent

Summer 1999

Editor's Page
MITCHELL COHEN
1

Comments & Opinions
MICHAEL WALZER on the moral justifications of war against Milosevic, 5
BOGDAN DENITCH on a botched just war, 7

Brave New Globe
JAMES K. GALBRAITH on the problems of globalization, 13

Politics Abroad
ANDREI S. MARKOVITS on the identity crisis of the German left, 17
DANIEL A. BELL on Marxist theory and Chinese reality, 20
DOUGLAS W. PAYNE on Grenada, 23
FORREST D. COLBURN on inequality in Latin America, 26

Articles
Bankruptcy and Zeal
The Republican Dialectic
SEAN WILENTZ
31

Mosaics and Melting Pots
GEORGE M. FREDRICKSON
36

Rejuvenating Free Expression
An Argument for Minors' First Amendment Rights
MARJORIE HEINS
43

On Evils Abroad and America's New World Order
JAMES B. RULE
50

The Third Way and the Future of Social Democracy
DAVID KUSNET AND RUY TEIXEIRA
58

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Egalitarian Strategies
JOHN E. ROEMER
64

Views from the Burning Bridge
MARSHALL BERMAN
77

Arguments
BRUCE ACKERMAN and MITCHELL COHEN debate
public funding for opera, 89

Notebook
NICOLAUS MILLS on thirty-five years after Freedom Summer, 101
JO-ANN MORT on the Internet and the war in Yugoslavia, 103

Books
GEORGE SCIALABBA on Russell Jacoby's *The End of Utopia*, 107
RUTH ROSEN on Daniel Horowitz's *Betty Friedan and the Making of* The Feminine Mystique, 111
KATHLEEN KISNER on Lauren Slater's *Prozac Diary*, 115
XIAORONG LI on *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, Joanne Bauer and Daniel A. Bell, eds., 118
ALLISON XANTHA MILLER on Andrew Morton's *Monica's Story*, 121

Letters
125

The Last Page
TODD GITLIN
128

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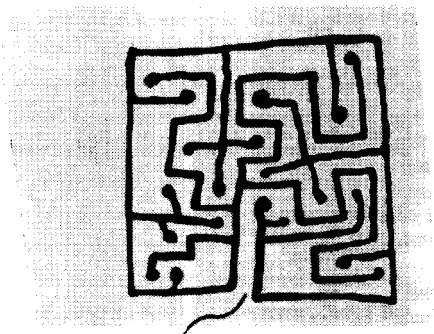

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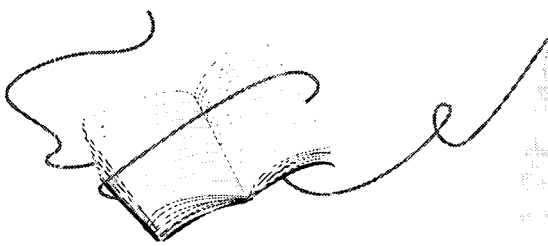

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Kosovo

Michael Walzer

At this writing, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia continues, and the Serbian destruction of Kosovar society also continues. Yes, the Serbian campaign must have been planned before the bombing began; the logistics of moving forty thousand soldiers are immensely complex. In some parts of Kosovo the harsh realities of ethnic cleansing were already visible before the decision to hit the Serbs with missiles and smart bombs was made. And given the Serbian record in Bosnia, and the mobilization of soldiers on the borders of Kosovo, and the refugees already on the move, military intervention seems to me entirely justified, even obligatory. But the brutal emptying of Kosovo in the weeks since is still in some sense a response to NATO's air campaign, and the speed with which it has been carried out is obviously a response—an effort to create facts on the ground before (as Milosevic apparently believes) the bombing stops and negotiations resume. Ethnic cleansing is perfectly consistent with the air campaign, and is partly its consequence.

I don't know what the expectations of NATO commanders were last March; ordinary citizens in the United States and Europe were certainly led to expect that the bombing would solve the problem fairly quickly. Once again, our faith in airpower is revealed as a kind of idolatry—we glorify the power of our own inventions. The truth remains, however, what it was before the inventions: soldiers with guns, going from house to house in a mountain village, can't be stopped by smart bombs. They can only be stopped by soldiers with guns.

But the countries involved in the NATO intervention are committed, for now at least, not to send in soldiers with guns. The promise wasn't made to Milosevic, obviously, but to the citizens of all the NATO countries: we won't send your children into battle. This promise was probably a political prerequisite of the intervention, and it is only after a month and more of bombing has failed to move the Serbs that political leaders are trying to crawl out from under it. We engaged ourselves, morally and politically, to provide the Kosovars with a technological fix, and if the fix didn't work, or didn't work quickly enough, we were ready (actually, as it turned out, not quite ready) to provide them with bread, blankets, and bandages. More than that, we said, we can't do. But there is something wrong here, for neither of these ways of helping is helpful enough. They don't meet the requirements of either politics or morality.

Maybe the bombing will eventually bring Milosevic down; maybe NATO will eventually decide to send in troops. But the initial form of the intervention raises a hard question. Are countries with armies whose soldiers cannot be put at risk morally or politically qualified to intervene? Even with a just cause and the best of intentions, how can we use military force in someone else's country unless we are prepared to deal with the unintended consequences of our actions? I suppose that had we been visibly ready in February or March to go into Kosovo on the ground, full-scale ethnic cleansing might have been forestalled. But that is too easy. Deterrence isn't effective unless the threat is plausible, and it's not clear at this moment that any of the Western democracies can pose a plausible threat.

We have armies that can't, or can't easily, be used. There are good democratic and even egalitarian reasons for this. Obviously, U.S. national security is not at stake in Kosovo (nor is the security of any of the European nations, but I will focus now on the United States), and so it isn't possible to mobilize citizens to

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defend their homes and families. In other countries, in earlier times, wars in faraway places were fought by the lower orders or by mercenaries, people without political clout. But though the United States is still, even increasingly, an inegalitarian society, no soldier's mother or father is without political clout. This is an advance for Americans, since our political leaders cannot send soldiers into battle without convincing the country that the war is morally or politically necessary and that victory requires, and is worth, American lives. But there is an easier path for these same leaders. They can fight a war without using armies at all and so without convincing the country of the war's necessity. An easier path, which leads, however, to a moral anomaly: a new and dangerous inequality makes its appearance.

We are ready, apparently, to kill Serbian soldiers; we are ready to risk what is euphemistically called "collateral damage" to Serbian, and also to Kosovar, civilians. But we are not ready to send American soldiers into battle. Well, I have no love of battles, and I fully accept the obligation of democratically elected leaders to safeguard the lives of their own people, all of them. But this is not a possible moral position. *You can't kill unless you are prepared to die.* No doubt, that's a hard sentence—especially so because its two pronouns don't have the same reference (as they did when Albert Camus first made this argument, writing about assassination): the first "you" refers to the leaders of NATO, the second to the children of ordinary citizens. Still, these political leaders cannot launch a campaign aimed to kill Serbian soldiers, and sure to kill others too, unless they are prepared to risk the lives of their own soldiers. They can try, they ought to try, to reduce those risks as much as they can. But they cannot claim, we cannot accept, that those lives are expendable, and these not.

IF THE building is burning, and there are people inside, firefighters must risk their lives to get them out. That's what firefighters are for. But this isn't our building; those aren't our people. Why should we send in our firefighters? Americans can't be the world's firefighters.

This is a familiar argument, and not implausible, even though it often comes from people who don't seem to believe in putting out fires at all. I have heard it especially from people on the left (not only in America), and it is to them, especially, that I want to respond. Indeed, Milosevic should have been stopped years ago, when the first reports of ethnic cleansing came out of Bosnia. And he should have been stopped by the European powers. The Balkans is a European mess. Austro-Hungary carved out an empire there. Germany fought a war in Yugoslavia; the Italians invaded Albania; the British armed Tito's partisans. There is a long history of military intervention and diplomatic intrigue. But today Europe as a military force exists only in alliance with the United States. That's not an eternal truth, and people who believe in international pluralism and a balance of power can hope for the emergence of an independent European Union with an army that it can put into action on its own. But it is true for now that no Kosovo intervention is possible without strong American involvement. If you want to stop Milosevic, you can argue about how to do it; there is no argument about who can do it.

That doesn't make us the world's firefighters. It was the Vietnamese who stopped Pol Pot in Cambodia, the Tanzanians who stopped Idi Amin in Uganda, the Indians who ended the killing in East Pakistan, the Nigerians who went into Liberia. Some of these were unilateral military acts, some (the Nigerian intervention, for example, and now the campaign in Kosovo) were authorized by regional alliances. Many people on the left yearn for a world where the UN, and only the UN, would act in all such cases. But given the oligarchic structure of the Security Council, it's not possible to count on this kind of action: in most of the cases on my list, UN intervention would have been vetoed by one of the oligarchs. Nor am I convinced that the world would be improved by having only one agent of international rescue. The men and women in the burning building are probably better served if they can appeal to more than a single set of firefighters.

But what is most important for the future of the left is that our people, our activists and

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supporters around the world, see the fires for what they are: deliberately set, the work of arsonists, aimed to kill, terribly dangerous. Of course, every fire has a complicated social, political, and economic background. It would be nice to understand it all. But once the burning begins something less than full understanding is necessary: a will to put out the fire—to find firefighters, close by if possible, and give them the support they need. From a moral/political perspective, I don't think it matters much if this particular fire isn't dangerous to me and mine. I can't just sit and watch. Or rather, the price of sitting and watching is a kind of moral corruption that leftists (and others too) must always resist. ●

MICHAEL WALZER is co-editor of *Dissent*.

Bogdan Denitch

A Botched Just War

I HAVE SUFFERED much anguish over NATO's war in Yugoslavia. Unlike almost every U.S. military intervention of the past half century, this is a just war—but badly and irresponsibly led. It was cowardly of the White House to decide on high-altitude bombing in order to spare itself the painful decision to use ground troops. How reassuring to Milosevic that no military expert believes the war can be won by air power alone.

The stand I have taken—favoring intervention and the use of ground troops (but opposing bombing cities)—horrifies my relatives, longtime associates, and close friends in Belgrade. Most of them, even those who are staunch critics of the Milosevic regime, absolutely oppose the NATO war. (Distressingly, almost none of the opposition groups in Serbia have tempered their condemnations of NATO with real words of regret for the regime's ethnic cleansing and war crimes in Kosovo.) Years of friendship have melted in the face of this disagreement, and I feel great personal loss.

Just and Unjust Interventions

My position was not easy to adopt. From my days in the left wing of the U.S. Young People's Socialist League, which I joined in 1948, I opposed almost every war and military intervention by the United States and its allies. In the mid-1960s I broke off relations with my longtime political mentor Max Shachtman, over his support for the attempted U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba and his critical backing of the war in Vietnam. I opposed the landing of marines in Lebanon, the invasion of Panama, and the idiotic military adventure in Grenada. I have criticized both the bloated U.S. defense budget and the rigid assumptions on which it is based.

And yet here I find myself not only defending a NATO intervention, but defending a war against my country of origin, where many of my closest friends, comrades, and relatives live. This choice did not come easily but it did come logically. There was even a Marxist tradition to draw on: the support of Marx and Engels for the North in the U.S. Civil War, as well as their support for the unilateral action of the British Empire to stop the slave trade. For that matter, they backed the Allies against Russia in the Crimean War. In none of those cases were the intervenors' hands clean or motives pure.

There is also plain common sense. As early as 1991 I advocated multilateral military intervention to prevent the breakup of Yugoslavia from turning into full-scale wars of secession. A very modest intervention could have prevented a great evil. Clearly the Bosnia intervention of 1995 came very late indeed, but it did provide a flawed peace that was better than the murderous ethnic war that had been going on. Similarly, it seemed to me that the 1992-1993 intervention in Somalia was wor-

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thy and failed in its aims only because the United States was unwilling to place its professional soldiers at risk. In still another case, a modest international intervention in Rwanda could have prevented a genocide. To its eternal shame, the United States worked overtime at the UN to block intervention in Rwanda. This policy is in good part explained by the fact that the people in question were African and not European.

Some will ask: shouldn't NATO have given the negotiating process more time to work before launching its strikes? Remember Milosevic's track record. His regime is primarily responsible for three previous wars of aggression in the region, as well as massive ethnic cleansing and mass murder of civilians and thousands of prisoners of war in Bosnia. It is also clear that this is a regime that would continue its repression in Kosovo while negotiating. It would only back down if faced with credible force and it would only keep its agreements if international troops were present to enforce them. Even before the NATO attack began, some twenty-five thousand Albanians had been ethnically cleansed—that is, moved with great brutality out of their homes. The massacre of unarmed civilians in the village of Racak took place *before* the bombing.

The fury of "pure" American leftists with my impermissible deviation was predictable but not serious. They needed to know nothing about Kosovo or the Milosevic regime. It was enough that the United States and NATO were involved, and everything became crystal clear. I sometimes envy that certainty and innocence, but alas, I choose to engage in politics and not morality plays.

The Disoriented Yugoslav Opposition

In Serbia, meanwhile, the democratic opposition has been seriously disoriented by the war. With a very few exceptions, citizens' organizations long known for their courageous if ineffective opposition to the regime have united as critics of NATO. They denounced the attack as a gross violation of international law and the rights of sovereign nations. Very few of them bothered to mention Milosevic's war against the Kosovo Albanians or its earlier aggression in Croatia and Bosnia. They seemed oblivious, more than a month after the NATO attacks, of the genocidal nature of the Yugoslav army's campaign in Kosovo.

And genocide is not too strong a word. The Convention on Genocide defines it as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

This clearly covers what the Milosevic regime is doing. The Albanian exodus from Kosovo was organized with great brutality and was obviously planned long in advance.

Why has the democratic opposition in Serbia been so half-hearted in its condemnations of ethnic cleansing? Bear in mind that it includes elements that are even *more* nationalist than the Milosevic camp. These elements oppose the regime for having "lost" the Krajina to the Croats and the war in Bosnia. And then there are those who attack the regime as "leftist" despite the fact that it is in a coalition with what is arguably the largest fascist party in Europe, Vojislav Seselj's Radicals. Very few indeed opposed the regime over its intransigent insistence that Kosovo is an "eternal" part of Serbia. Most have made a moral equivalence between the misdeeds of the Serbian police and army in Kosovo and the misdeeds of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The KLA's democratic credentials are, to put it mildly, dubious. But the more responsible wing of the Kosovar Albanians' movement—the decade-long nonviolent struggle under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova—received almost no support either from the West or from Serbian democrats. (The sole exception was the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, whose two deputies were thrown out of Parliament for their heresies.) Anger at NATO has for the moment united almost all of the public behind Milosevic. The April murder of a leading opposition journalist, Slavko Curuvlija, by what was probably a police death squad, helped silence those who might do otherwise. One cannot demand ir-

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rational heroism in the face of a ruthless regime. Nor is it difficult to understand that bombing makes people feel like victims.

What is hard to accept, however, is a persistent tone in the messages coming over by e-mail from Belgrade: shock and surprise that this should be happening to *them*. It is as if the Milosevic regime were somewhere else, as if they, the anguished correspondents, had absolutely no responsibility for what that regime has inflicted on the whole region. It's true that many of those protesting NATO opposed Milosevic's wars in Bosnia and Croatia, and his repression at home (with scandalously little help from the democratic West). They feel betrayed by what is in effect a vote of no confidence in their ability to effect change in Belgrade.

On the other hand, it is also the case that the Serbs have repeatedly re-elected this regime, and its even worse coalition partners, in balloting that was at least semi-free. The masses attending rock concerts to protest NATO's bombing have, for the most part, done nothing about repression in Kosovo.

There remains a small core of people who resist the enormous pressure for solidarity with the tribe. Sonja Biserko of the Helsinki Committee publicly declares (from her present asylum in Sweden) that Serbia deserves to lose this war, and that it will have to be decontaminated of fascism and nationalism, much as Germany underwent denazification after the Second World War. The eminent human rights lawyer Srdjan Popovic, also in self-imposed exile, calls for ground troops and the defeat of the regime. So does the filmmaker Dusan Makavejev, despite his criticism of the bombing as a strategy. Natasa Kandic of the Humanitarian Law Center has sent regular bulletins about arrests in Kosovo. The remarkable Nenad Canak, leader of the Vojvodina Social Democrats, writes on e-mail that the destruction of Novi Sad's bridges began in 1991, when the Novi Sad Army corps invaded Croatia. The time has come to reap what was sown then.

There are others who can't be named for safety's sake and there are even a handful of nongovernmental organizations—mostly those who received the *least* aid from the countless foundations that were supposed to help build Yugoslav democracy—whose statements against the bombing also mention, if only tepidly, Belgrade's war in Kosovo. These include the heroic Women in Black and some of the democratic socialists and trade unionists.

Democrats In Croatia and Bosnia

Democratic activists in Croatia and Bosnia have reacted differently. For the most part, they support the NATO campaign—albeit with reservations, and the bitter complaint that this should have been done much earlier, when tens of thousands of lives could have been saved, and millions spared ethnic cleansing. These activists' communications with longtime friends and associates in Serbia are now strained to the breaking point, which does not augur well for future cooperation.

One of the most moving statements comes from Boris Dezulovic, an editor of *Feral Tribune*, one of the harshest critics of Tudjman's nationalist Croat regime. On April 22 he posted the following statement (abridged here) on the Internet Web site zamir.net, an antiwar network funded by the Open Society Institute:

Just Imagine

Imagine that NATO surrounds Belgrade and that no one can enter or leave the city.

Imagine that from a skyscraper on the outskirts of the city snipers are shooting at women and children.

Imagine that there are eight thousand dead children and young people under eighteen.

Imagine that NATO commandos take all wounded from the military hospital and kill them nearby.

Imagine that NATO soldiers take *all* males out of Belgrade and kill them.

Imagine that NATO soldiers break into your houses and rape your daughters and wives. . . .

There are many of us here who do not send off NATO's planes with flowers and alcohol (*rakija*), and who did not wish this on you. I however know at of least two people in Dedinje [where the Milosevices live] who not only wished this on you but prepared it. I wish you all the luck in the world, but you should in the meantime, at least briefly, imagine and think about these things.

Good luck, and greetings from Split.

(*Translation by B.D.*)

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Then there is a text posted on the Internet newsgroup uswarreport on April 18, attributed to Slavenka Drakulic, also a fierce critic of the Croat regime*:

> And now, these same citizens of Serbia who are not Albanians, for Albanians have been excluded not only from civil but also from human status a long time ago—the same people that were not concerned by Sarajevo or Srebrenica, nor Dubrovnik or Vukovar, not even Drenica and Racak —they dare to parade around with a target on their chest. For years they have been rejecting the understanding that they are at war. The war did not concern them, the war was happening somewhere else. But suddenly, they have become victims and that is why they are wearing targets.... At the same time a few hundred kilometers further, some other citizens of the same state of Serbia are standing in mud for days, in the rain....They have no place to go back to, no house, no concert, no lunch, no native land. Nothing. They do not need a paper target, they do not need symbols. They know that they are targets, every man, woman, child....But they are Albanians. They are something different... Two parallel tragedies are in progress. The first is the suffering of the Albanian people, their exodus which has already been called genocide by some people. There is no use to remind us now (but it should not be forgotten) that their fate has been shared by Croatians and Bosnians and also the Serbs from the Krajina. The second tragedy is the autism of the Serbian people who are not aware of the consequences of their politics.

These are terrible things to write and say to people who were once your comrades and friends—and in my case even relatives—and who are being bombed. But they need to be said. And this tragedy will only be compounded if, after all the anguish and bombing, the West signs a shameful compromise peace that leaves Serbia and Montenegro in ruins, Albania and Macedonia destabilized, the Kosovo Albanians rotting in camps from which only a trickle are permitted to return to Kosovo, and, worst of all, Slobodan Milosevic still in power as the "indispensable man" created by years of disgraceful Washington policies. There are other possible outcomes, but today I cannot imagine a good scenario. ●

*For more information on this e-mail journal and other information services and media programs of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting, visit the IWPR Web site at www.iwpr.net.

BOGDAN DENITCH is director of the Institute for Transitions to Democracy, a nongovernmental organization working in Croatia, Bosnia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. He is also the Democratic Socialists of America representative to the Socialist International.

To Our Contributors

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(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is dissent@igc.org.

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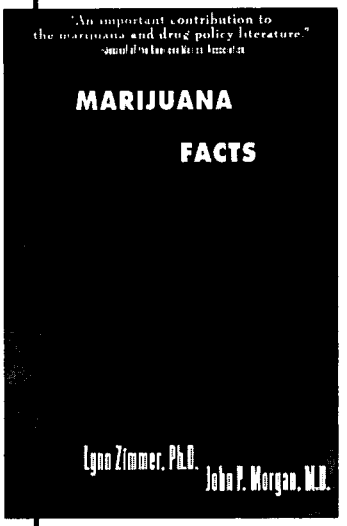

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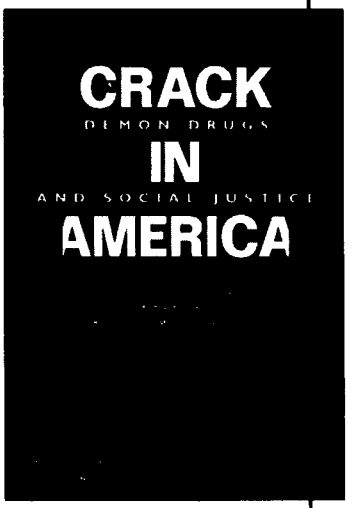

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Slum area of Jakarta, with financial district in background. ©Sean Sprague/IMPACT VISUALS

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The Crisis of Globalization

James K. Galbraith

THE DOCTRINE known as the Washington Consensus was the Apostle's Creed of globalization. It was an expression of faith that markets are efficient, that states are unnecessary, that the poor and the rich have no conflicting interests, that things turn out for the best when left alone. It held that privatization and deregulation and open capital markets promote economic development, that governments should balance budgets and fight inflation and do almost nothing else.

This faith has now proved totally unfounded.

The truth is that people need to eat every day. Policies that guarantee that they can do so, and with steadily improving diets and housing and health and other material conditions of life over long time spans, are good policies. Policies that foster instability directly or indirectly, that prevent poor people from eating in the name of efficiency or liberalism or even in the name of freedom, are not good policies. And it is possible to distinguish policies that meet this minimum standard from policies that do not.

The push for competition, deregulation, privatization, and open capital markets has undermined economic prospects for many millions of the world's poorest people. It is therefore not merely a naive and misguided crusade. To the extent that it undermines the stable provision of daily bread, it is dangerous to the safety and stability of the world, including ourselves. The greatest single danger right now is in Russia, a catastrophic example of the failure of free market doctrine. But serious dangers have also emerged in Asia and Latin America and they are not going to go away soon.

There is, in short, a crisis of the Washington Consensus.

The crisis of the Washington Consensus is visible to everybody. But not everybody is willing to admit it. Indeed, as bad policies produced policy failures, those committed to the policies developed a defense mechanism. They saw every unwelcome case as an unfortunate exception. Mexico was an exception—there was a revolt in Chiapas, an assassination in Tijuana. Then Korea, Thailand, Indonesia became exceptions: corruption, crony capitalism on an unimaginably massive scale, was discovered, but *after* the crisis hit. And then there came the Russian exception. In Russia, we are told, Dostoyevskian criminality welled up from the corpse of Soviet communism to overcome the efficiencies and incentives of free markets.

But when the exceptions outnumber the examples, there must be trouble with the rules. Where are the success stories of liberalization, privatization, deregulation, sound money, and balanced budgets? Where are the emerging markets that have emerged, the developing countries that have developed, the transition economies that have truly completed a successful and happy transition? Look closely. Look hard. They do not exist.

In each of the supposed exceptions—Russia, Korea, Mexico, and also Brazil—state-directed development programs have been liberalized, privatized, deregulated. But then, capital inflows led to currency overvaluation, making imports cheap but exports uncompetitive. As early promises of "transformation" proved unrealistic, the investor mood soured. A flight to quality began, usually following moves to raise interest rates in the "quality" countries—notably the United States in 1994 and in early 1997. A very small move in U.S. interest rates in March 1997 precipitated the outflows of capital from Asia that led to the Thai crisis.

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The Russian case is especially sad and dramatic. In 1917 the Bolshevik revolution promised a war-weary Russian people liberation and deliverance from oppression. It took them seventy years to forget the essential lesson of that experience, which is that there are no easy, sudden, miraculous transitions. In 1992, the advocates of shock therapy followed the Bolshevik path, against the good sense of much of the Russian political order, by Bolshevik means. This was the true meaning of Boris Yeltsin's 1993 military assault on the Russian Parliament, an act of violence that we in the West tolerated, to our shame, in the name of "economic reform."

Privatization and deregulation in Russia did not create efficient and competitive markets, but instead large and pernicious private monopolists, the oligarchs, and the mafiosi, with control over competing industrial empires and the news media. And these empires sponsored their own banks, which were not banks at all but rather simply speculative pools, serving none of the essential functions of commercial banks. Meanwhile, the state followed a rigid policy of limiting expenditures, so that even wages and pension obligations duly incurred were not paid—as if the United States government were to refuse to pay Social Security checks because of a budget deficit! The private sector literally ran out of money. The payments system ceased to function; tax collection became impossible because there was nothing to tax. The state financed itself through a pyramid scheme of short-term debts—the GKO market—which collapsed as pyramids must on August 17, 1998. This was the end of free-market radicalism in Russia—and still, the Washington Consensus holds that Russia must "stay the course" on "economic reform."

Throughout Asia in the 1990s, stable industrial growth gave way to go-go expansions based heavily on real-estate speculation and commercial office development. Many more office towers went up, in Bangkok, Djakarta, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, than could reasonably be put to use. Once finished, these towers do not go away; they stay empty but available, and so remain a drug on the market, inhibiting new construction. Recovery from the crash of such bubbles is a slow process. It took five years or longer in the Texas of the mid-1980s.

As for Brazil, through the early fall of 1998 it was said that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would restore confidence and keep the Brazilian *real* afloat. But the *real* has since been devalued and Brazil is heading for a deep recession. The problem here does not originate with Brazil, and cannot be resolved by any actions the Brazilians alone might take. It lies, rather, in the international capital markets. Investors with exposure in Asia, and with losses in Russia, must reduce their lending to other large borrowers, irrespective of conditions in those countries. It is this imperative that is Brazil's problem today.

ARE THERE alternatives? Yes. The grim history I've just outlined is not uniform. Over the past half-century, successful and prolonged periods of strong global development have always occurred in countries with strong governments, mixed economic structures and weakly developed capital markets. This was the case of Europe and Japan following World War II, of Korea and Taiwan in the eighties and nineties, of China after 1979. These cases, and not the free market liberal examples—such as, say, Argentina after the mid-1970s or Mexico after 1986 or the Philippines or Bolivia—are the success stories of global economic development in our time.

In Korea, for instance, the great period of economic development was, indeed, a time of repressive crony capitalism. After 1975, the Korean government took note of the fate of South Vietnam, drew its own conclusions about the depth of American commitment, and embarked on a program of heavy and chemical industrialization that emphasized dual-use technologies: the first major product of Hyundai Heavy Industries, for example, was a knock-off of the M-60 tank.

The Korean industrialization policy was not, in any static sense, efficient. No market would have chosen this course of action. The major players in the Korean economy—the state, the banks, the conglomerates known as *chaebols*—were yoked together in pursuit of their goals. Workers and their wage demands

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were repressed. And the initial search for markets was by no means entirely successful. There wasn't a big demand for those tanks, and so Hyundai decided to try building passenger cars instead.

Yet, when one adds up the balance sheet of the Korean model, can anyone seriously argue that the country would be richer today if it had done nothing in 1975? That it would be more middle class or more democratic?

It is true that Korea experienced the first harsh blows of the Asian financial crisis. But why? By 1997, the industrial policy was a thing of the distant past. Korean banks had become deregulated in 1992. What they did was to diversify—supporting vast expansion and industrial diversification schemes of the *chaebol* (Samsung's adventure into motor cars, for example) and lending to such places as Indonesia, where the Koreans evidently bought paper recommended to them by their American counterparts. The crash of Indonesia spread to Korea by these financial channels. It was not a crisis of crony capitalism, but of crony banking—deregulated and globalized.

One can multiply cases, but let us look at just one other, that of China.

China is a country with a fifty-year tradition of one-party government. For thirty of those years, it was a case study in regimentation, ideology, and economic failure. At one point, there occurred an entirely avoidable, catastrophic famine during which twenty or thirty million people perished. In the first years of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, village rations amounted to less than a pound of rice per day.

Beginning in 1979, however, China embarked on reforms that changed the face of the country. These began with the most massive agricultural reform in human history, reforms that effectively ended food poverty in China in five years. After that, policies that welcomed long-term direct investment, that fostered township and village enterprises, joint ventures, and private enterprises, put into place a vast and continuing improvement in human living standards. Over twenty years, average living standards quadrupled; indeed growth has been so rapid that many people can perceive the improvement in their standard of living from month to month.

China's case demonstrates the potential effectiveness of sustained development policies—of policies that emphasize the priority of steady improvement over long periods of time. Unlike Russia, China made the mistake of the Great Leap Forward only once. And it never liberalized its capital markets or its capital account, for fear that such actions would prove a fatal lure, unleashing a cycle of boom and bust that a poor nation cannot tolerate for long.

China is no democracy. It is not politically free. But one must also acknowledge that the Chinese government has delivered on the essential economic demands of the Chinese people, namely food and housing, and that an alternative regime that did not deliver on these needs would not have been able to deliver internal peace, democracy, or human rights either.

So, what can the United States do now? To begin with, we can recognize that globalized finance makes the Federal Reserve the central banker to much of the developing world. Interest rate cuts last fall had an important stabilizing effect on global markets. But this effect is temporary; and the Fed's powers are limited. After a cut, another one is eventually required; and the cut from one to one-half percent lacks the force of the reduction from six percent to four. There is a strong case for lower interest rates, but we must also remember that the long term arrives when such short-term policies run out of steam.

Then there is fiscal policy. If it is a good idea for Japan to run a deficit to fight the global recession, why is it wise for the United States to be running a surplus that vastly offsets the deficit in Japan? It isn't. The United States should expand its own economy using all the tools available for this purpose.

Then there is the matter of what we preach to the world and the policies we support. If it is a good idea for the government of the United States to grow in line with our economy, then it is also a good idea for the governments of other countries to grow as their economies do. Global development policy should be geared toward strengthening that capacity, not crippling it.

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Every functional private economy has, and needs, a core of state, regional, and municipal enterprises and distribution channels to assure food and basic necessities to low-income populations. Such systems stabilize the market institutions, which work better for people with higher incomes. They help prevent criminal monopolization of critical distribution networks by setting up an accountable alternative. International assistance should seek to strengthen these public networks where they exist and to build them where they do not. Efforts to do just this in Russia today, under the present government, should be supported and not opposed.

There is an obvious conflict between pro-growth policies and "investor confidence." Investors like to be repaid in the short run. But given that conflict, it is a fool's bargain to place investor confidence above the pursuit of development. Strong national governments have a sovereign right to regulate capital flows and banks operating on their soil—as much right as any nation has to control the flow of people across its national frontiers and to regulate their activities at home. A Tobin Tax on foreign exchange should be enacted here, not only to slow speculation in the United States, but also to signal our acceptance of this principle for other countries, for whom different mechanisms of capital control may be more suitable in different cases.

Beyond this, a major reconstruction of world financial practices, aimed at restoring stability and strengthening the regulatory and planning capacities of national governments, is in order. The IMF needs new leadership, not tied to recent dogmas. But the IMF is also too small, and too thinly spread, to be useful in helping countries with the design and implementation of effective national development schemes. Regional financial institutions, as suggested for Asia by Japanese Deputy Finance Minister Eisuke Sakakibara, are therefore also needed, and U.S. opposition to them should be dropped.

MOST OF ALL, we must give up illusions. The neoliberal experiment is a failure. And it is a failure not because of unforeseeable events, but because it was and is systematically and fundamentally flawed. We need many changes from this naive and doomed vision of an ungoverned world order. We need large changes, and the need is great while time, I believe, is short. We must bring the Reagan era to a final end. We must return to development policies for the people whose needs matter most in the large scheme of things, namely the millions of hard-working people in poor countries who need to eat every day. ●

JAMES K. GALBRAITH is the author of *Created Unequal: The Crisis in American Pay*. He is working on a new book on global inequality.

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The Identity Crisis of the German Left

A Report from Berlin

Andrei S. Markovits

THE YEAR 1999 will be second in significance only to 1989 in the history of postwar German politics. The transition from Bonn to Berlin as the country's capital was completed this year, and the Euro was inaugurated during a German presidency of the European Union. The year marks the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fiftieth anniversary of the Federal Republic. It also marks NATO's fiftieth birthday, which took place during its first shooting war—a war that has included the first German military action since the fall of Nazism. All this has happened on the watch of the first national "Red-Green" (Social Democratic-Green Party) governing coalition.

Unlike previous governments in the Federal Republic of Germany, this coalition came to power through a significant shift in the voters' political preferences. Until the 1998 elections, change took place through postelection jockeying by the three main parties, in particular the small, whimsical Free Democrats, who switched their support from the conservative Christian Democrats to the progressive Social Democrats and back again. This time, however, after sixteen years of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, voters clearly wanted something new.

The result represents a generational change. The cabinet is a who's who of '68ers. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder once headed the "Jusos," the radical young socialist wing of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, now minister of development with responsibility for the third world, was once known as Red Heidi. Herta Daeubler-Gmelin, minister of justice, and Walter Riester, minister of labor, came out of 1960s leftism, as did Rudolf Scharping, defense minister, and Oskar Lafontaine, who was the government's finance minister until his unexpected resignation in the spring. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer comes from Frankfurt's street-fighting anarcho-socialist "Sponti" scene. The interior minister, Otto Schily, is the only sexagenarian in the cabinet. A founder of the Greens (although now an SPDer), he was once the main defense attorney for Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, Germany's most notorious urban guerillas. Ironically, thirty-nine-year-old Andrea Fischer, a Green minister in charge of health, is the sole cabinet member who generationally has no connection with 1960s leftism.

Although Germans gave their new government a low-key welcome—it contrasted sharply with the exuberance that accompanied François Mitterrand's socialist victory in France in 1981 and Tony Blair's Labour triumph in Britain in 1997—expectations were nonetheless high. The Red-Green government seemed to offer real policy changes concerning economic equality, social justice, and ecology. The record so far is mixed, but this much is sure: after ten months in power, the German left is in the midst of its most profound identity crisis since 1968.

A HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT level has beset Germany for the past dozen years. It is now about 11 percent (4.5 million people) and reaches double that figure in parts of former East Germany. Unemployment was the main reason voters turned to the Social Democrats, who presented an image of compassion and competence, embodied respectively by Lafontaine and Schröder. Alas, what was supposed to be a dynamic combination

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of the programmatic and the pragmatic degenerated into bickering, leading finally to Lafontaine's exit.

The government began on an egalitarian roll: it restored health benefits and unemployment compensation packages, which Kohl had begun to curtail (albeit gradually by American standards). The Red-Green coalition reworked tax policy to the clear advantage of middle- and low-income earners. All of this caused no major friction between the more centrist Schröderists and the more radical Lafontainians.

Problems arose when the Lafontainians argued for more radical economic reform. Lafontaine attacked the Bundesbank, one of postwar Germany's most revered institutions, for its tight monetary policy and stringent interest-rate controls (both aimed to prevent the slightest inflation). Although the European Central Bank (ECB) has replaced it as part of the process of Europe's monetary unification, Germans made sure that the ECB modelled itself after the Bundesbank. Lafontaine's constant calls for a more permissive monetary policy and lower interest rates irked German business. But irritation was also felt by other elements of the German public (including some Social Democrats), for whom price stability and zero inflation were higher priorities than fighting unemployment. When Lafontaine lectured G-7 finance ministers on the desirability of "target zones" in which currencies would be pegged to each other rather than traded freely, the Schröderists were deeply dismayed. Add to all this the personality clashes between Schröder and Lafontaine—both are strong-willed and vain—and a combustible atmosphere developed. When Lafontaine quit, the business community was rid of the man it considered its most potent foe. Champagne bottles popped open at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the DAX—Germany's Dow Jones Index—shot up. Most unions, in turn, bemoaned Lafontaine's departure and saw it as a clear victory for capital. The government's main mandate—to reduce unemployment in a significant way—has remained unfulfilled. According to most economists, the small drop in unemployment that occurred this past spring was due more to specific events (like the weather) than to the government's policies.

The Greens' demands for ecological reforms were scuttled barely four months into the new government's term. Their call to close all nineteen German nuclear power plants by 2002 was tabled for an indefinite period. Soon after this, their attempt to persuade France to shut down its nuclear plants along the border touched off an ugly scene of old-style nationalism when German Green Daniel Cohn-Bendit (of Paris '68 fame), running on the French Green ticket in European parliamentary elections as part of the first attempt at a cross-border candidacy, was jeered by French workers who saw in the German Greens' ecological concerns a threat to their jobs. Finally, the Greens had to accept a painful trimming of the tax increases they proposed on sources of energy that polluted the environment.

It is in the area of social justice that the Red-Green government won its most impressive victory, when it passed a new citizenship law that redefines what it means to be German. Germany's century-old legal framework of blood lineage (*jus sanguinis*) as a basis of citizenship was replaced with a variant of *jus soli*, in which place of birth determines who will be part of the German polity. This legislation significantly dilutes the Greens' original proposal, which had a much more permissive view of citizenship than either the Social Democrats or the Free Democrats would allow. Still, the new law transformed an essential dimension of liberal democracy in Germany by redefining political inclusion. It thus moved the country much closer to the Western (that is, Anglo-American and French) notion of territorially based citizenship. Also, it moves the notion of "Germanness" in a new direction—away from its unhappy past and more appropriate to the unifying Europe of today, where Germany is the most powerful actor.

Germany's history cast its long shadow on the Red-Green coalition from its first day in office. Last October, author Martin Walser used a prestigious public forum to protest what he called the "moral cudgel" of Auschwitz, which, he said, is used to constrain and de-

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mean today's Germany. Nobody from the new government joined Ignaz Bubis, head of the German Jewish community, in objecting to these remarks. Indeed, Chancellor Schröder declared on a number of occasions that a poet and author like Walser had license to say what politicians could not. This squared with Schröder's repeated assertions that his government would project a newly confident sense of German national identity. Such remarks could only come from a postwar baby boomer whose age and political orientation placed him beyond any suspicion of sympathy with right-wing radicalism, let alone National Socialism. What would have been unacceptable from Helmut Kohl and Christian Democrats is commonplace under Schröder.

This new situation is particularly evident when it comes to actions in Kosovo. German involvement in NATO's Kosovo action inevitably generated intense debate, because it is Germany's first military engagement since the fall of the Third Reich. Opponents of participation often recalled Germany's heinous crimes against the Serbs during World War II. They also pointed to Bosnian Muslims' and Croats' collaboration with the Nazis. Some blamed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) for the whole situation and some believed the KLA to be little more than a revival of the Albanian SS division that fought alongside the Nazis. There was the usual dose of anti-Americanism as well, but this time, in contrast to the Gulf War, antiwar activists could ascribe blame directly to Germany—which, they claimed, in its desire to dismantle a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia yet again, as the Nazis did in 1941, had bamboozled America into fighting a proxy war.

World War II also served to justify supporters of NATO. Defense Minister Scharping and foreign minister Fischer repeatedly invoked the memory of Auschwitz and the Nazi death camps in their defense of the war. It was, they insisted, the duty of the grandchildren of the perpetrators of the Holocaust to stop genocidal ethnic cleansing. Milosevic was often compared to Hitler, at least in his evil intentions.

So Kosovo made things more complicated for the already complex German left. Suddenly, anti-NATO leftists found themselves on the same side as Germany's neo-Nazis and other rightwingers who supported the Serbs. Pro-NATO leftists, in contrast, broke a fifty-year tradition of post-Nazi pacifism and allied themselves with the awful Americans.

THE IDENTITY of the Social Democratic ("old") left has always been tied to promotion of economic and social equality. If a Red-Green government cannot make a significant dent in the unemployment rate by the end of its term in 2002, it will have betrayed the most consistent tenet of progressive politics. The German New Left's identity was defined by ecological concerns and inclusive politics. Here, too, this government's record has not yet lived up to its commitments. Except for redefining citizenship, it has not fulfilled its promises of social and ecological reform. Finally, both lefts—old and new—still have difficulties with Germany's power. They felt more comfortable with the Bonn Republic—an "economic giant but a political dwarf." Those days of innocence were ended this spring, with the birth of the Berlin Republic and the beginning of the Kosovo war. For fifty years, the Bonn Republic delegated power and responsibilities to the French or to the Americans. Kosovo represents an unexpectedly early wake-up call to new and complex realities that the German left can no longer avoid. ●

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From Mao to Jiang

China's Transition to Communism

Daniel A. Bell

In 1956, Mao Zedong completed one of his proudest achievements: the abolition of private property in China. Over forty years later—March 17, 1999, to be exact—the Chinese Communist Party, led by Jiang Zemin, formally reversed course. The National People's Congress voted 98 percent in favor of a constitutional amendment that redefined the private sector from a "complementary" to an "important part" of the economy. The amendment also promised government protection "for the legal interests and rights of the private economy."

The Jiang regime is, of course, merely putting into legal form China's de facto endorsement of the private sector that began with Deng Xiaoping's reform program in the late 1970s. The standard view of modern Chinese history—a view widely shared both inside and outside China—is that Deng acknowledged, and remedied, the folly of Mao's disastrous experiment with Marxism. As the eminent Sinologist Roderick MacFarquhar put it, "[Deng] deconstructed the China he took over: not the traditional China of Confucian values and Taoist cults, but the China of Communist principles and practices which he had himself helped Mao to superimpose upon their land." According to MacFarquhar, Marxism led the Chinese nation to disaster, and Deng Xiaoping—whatever his faults—at least had the vision to replace Marxism with capitalist-style practices.

The standard view, however, is wrong. The basic problem is that it puts the blame for China's woes on Marxism, and more specifically on Marx himself, rather than on Mao's (mis)interpretation of Marx's ideas. If we look at Marx himself, it will become immediately apparent that Mao grossly distorted his original vision. More surprisingly, perhaps, Marx would probably have been an enthusiastic supporter of the Deng/Jiang capitalist economic reform program.

Marx and History

Marx's theory of history is undoubtedly familiar to many readers of *Dissent*, but it is worth restating in brief. It rests on the idea that there is a continual growth in productive forces (meaning technology and the knowledge needed to operate it) and that as technology improves, the productive process becomes more and more efficient. Human society will eventually reach a stage in which people can be largely freed from the tedium of unwanted labor to satisfy their physical needs. Marx divided history into epochs, each corresponding to different levels of technological development. In "primitive" society, technology is undeveloped, people must work hard to satisfy basic needs, and there is no surplus to free them to do other things. Basically, people have to work all the time, hunting, gathering, and growing food. Then new technology is invented, which allows people to produce things more efficiently; a small surplus results, and a small class of people can now live off that surplus without working. This is how class-divided societies emerge.

Technology continues to advance until steam mills and other large machines permit the mass production of goods with less and less physical input. People reorganize their relations of production—who has economic power over other people and who owns what in the workplace—so that they can make the best use possible of the technology. When large-scale machinery develops, they find it most efficient to structure economic life in a capitalist way. Most people are now workers—a large class of "producers"—who sell their la-

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bor for a wage. Capitalists, on the other hand, own the tools, the machinery, and natural resources. They hire workers and claim ownership over their products, which they sell in turn on the market. Meanwhile, the legal and political "superstructure"—the laws and political institutions of a particular society—ensure that capitalism is stabilized. For example, the legislature passes laws securing private property (as in contemporary China), which makes it illegal for workers to claim ownership of the machinery in the workplace.

In capitalism, technology develops more quickly than ever before, and the material surplus expands exponentially. This occurs because capitalists compete with each other in order to make a profit, and hence they have a special incentive to develop new, ever more efficient means to produce goods. Eventually, technology is so advanced that the society produces a huge material surplus. However, the most efficient way of deploying this new machinery is no longer that of the typical capitalist factory. Instead of just doing one simple task on an assembly line, workers must be more creative and knowledgeable. But they also come to realize that by a radical restructuring of the organization of work—for example, ensuring that machines are communally owned and that profits are distributed fairly to all workers instead of going to greedy capitalists—their lot will be improved as well as that of society as a whole. That is the moment of revolution. Private property is abolished, and machines are made to work for the betterment of humanity instead of the interests of one small class. Technology does most of the dirty work needed to meet physical needs and people are finally free to do the things they want to do—go fishing, read books, design and create works of beauty, and so on. Unpleasant work will be limited to the maintenance of machinery and other tasks required to keep the system going.

Mao versus Marx

Far from being inspired by Marx, Mao seems to have gone out of his way to distort his ideas. Consider the Great Leap Forward. This was an expression of Mao's belief that human will and strength could vanquish all natural and technical challenges. Mao thought that he could accomplish a technological and thus economic revolution and overtake developed countries like Britain simply by instilling the masses with revolutionary fervor. Thus, in 1958 he launched a radical program to establish communes and diverted resources into building local backyard steel furnaces. This was meant to bypass capitalism and—in the words of a document issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party—to "complete the building of socialism ahead of time."

The result was a catastrophe. Grain production plummeted, the furnaces were not able to produce a high-standard product, and the ensuing chaos led to a famine that claimed at least twenty million lives between 1959 and 1962. This was not widely publicized at the time. In 1966 Mao plunged his country into yet another disastrous attempt to bring about a major transformation simply by means of instilling "revolutionary consciousness"—the ten-year nightmare known as the Cultural Revolution.

MARX WOULD have been appalled. In his own day, Marx was severely critical of "utopian socialists" who tried to build communism "ahead of time." It is useless, Marx argued, to discuss communism if its material foundations are not present. The most important of these is advanced technology, as we have seen. Without this "absolutely essential material premise," as Marx once put it, "want is merely made general, and with want the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored." That is, the only way to avoid competition for scarce goods is to go through a long process in which machines are so developed that they yield a huge surplus that can meet everyone's needs. Capitalism, the economic system that does most to speed up technological progress, was for Marx a necessary stage of development. He didn't speculate in detail about what would happen if political leaders tried to implement communism in poor countries, but there is little doubt that he would have predicted that such attempts were doomed.

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The Transition to Communism

Soon after Deng Xiaoping took over in December 1978, China embarked on a capitalist-style economic reform program. Rural families were allowed to increase the amount of land they could till as private plots and they were permitted to sell the produce on the open market at unpegged prices. Urban entrepreneurs were encouraged to experiment with businesses, and foreign corporations were encouraged to bring technology to China. The people as a whole were told that "to get rich is glorious." The result is one of the major transformations of the late twentieth century—double-digit growth rates, the material improvement of literally hundreds of millions of people's lives, and predictions that China will become an economic superpower in the twenty-first century. This has been accompanied, needless to say, by the ills of capitalism, such as corruption, growing inequality, unemployment, and the blind worship of money. Nonetheless, Marx would have been impressed by the massive expansion of productive power accomplished through these capitalist reforms. Communism, he might have said (he would hope, anyway) is all that much more likely now that its "absolutely essential material premises" were being fashioned. Of course, China is still a relatively undeveloped country, and capitalism—or what the Chinese Communist Party labels the "primary stage of socialism"—looks set to stay for the foreseeable future. But the ultimate goal, according to Jing Shuping (chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce), is still to "implement communism." It might take fifty years, or it might take one hundred. It seems that the Chinese Communist Party has finally put China on the road to communism.

Some Qualifications

There are two senses, however, in which the Jiang regime continues to deviate from Marx. First, the Communist Party has not grasped fully Marx's claim that new economic structures give rise to new legal and political institutions. As Marx famously put it, "with the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed." Capitalist relations of production are stabilized, as Jiang recognizes, by the legal recognition of property rights. Yet capitalist countries also rely on other civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and the right to choose one's political leaders in periodic elections. From a Marxist perspective, these freedoms stabilize the system by providing an outlet for dissent and thus defusing revolutionary energy. The Chinese Communist Party, however, has attempted to carry out a capitalist economic transformation while maintaining obsolete legal and political institutions. We know what happened to those who were trying to bring about peaceful legal and political change in June 1989. In short, Chinese leaders cannot forever put off the day when they will have to fashion the same kinds of legal and political institutions that help to stabilize the relations of production in other capitalist countries.

Second, the Chinese Communist Party hasn't understood that promoting capitalism does not require repression of independent unions and workers' rights. Marx himself, while recognizing that developing countries needed to go through a capitalist phase, devoted much energy to the improvement of workers' rights in capitalist countries. He went to great lengths to describe the cruel indignities inflicted upon workers by capitalism and he wanted communists to struggle on behalf of those who paid the price for rapid economic development.

One last qualification. Even if China adopts liberal-democratic rights and allows the protection of workers' interests, the final outcome of its experience with communism—if European history is any guide—is not likely to live up to Marx's expectations. This is not to imply that Marx himself would have the same expectations if he were around today. No doubt he would repeat the claim, uttered at the end of his life: "What is certain is that I am not a Marxist." This time, however, he would really mean it. The problem is not just that so-called Marxists such as Mao distort his ideas for their own dubious purposes. The deeper problem is that twentieth-century history has cast doubt on many of Marx's basic tenets, including the optimistic expectation that advanced technology would cause people to restructure economic life so that machines would work for the

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benefit of humanity instead of a small capitalist class. But the modern-day Marx—now more willing to admit that history is not pre-determined and that political intervention based on moral ideals can tilt the balance one way or another—could reply that we should still try to harness machinery to free people from drudge labor. This is not inevitable, of course, but it is an ideal worth pursuing. If and when China becomes a rich, technologically advanced country, perhaps the Chinese Communist Party can keep this in mind. ●

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Douglas W. Payne

Remembering Grenada

THE WALLS of Maurice Bishop's prime ministerial office are still blackened from the flames that swept through Butler House during the U.S. invasion in 1983. Some Grenadians say the fire that engulfed the government compound high upon the bluff at the mouth of St. George's harbor was ignited by the strafing of Cobra helicopter gunships. Others believe it was set deliberately to keep the Marines from seizing official records. No one knows for sure, just as nobody knows what happened to the body of Bishop, murdered six days earlier by rivals in the New Jewel Movement (NJM) as the Grenadian Revolution devoured itself. Now, more than a decade and a half later, Butler House is slated for demolition. A giant hotel and marina complex will be constructed in its place, financed by an East European tycoon whose influence on this tiny island may in the end rival that of Fidel Castro and Ronald Reagan.

Bishop's headquarters were named for Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, a founder of the Caribbean labor movement who in the 1930s led strikes by fellow Grenadian oil workers in Trinidad and was jailed for five years by the British colonial authorities. Before it became Butler House the now-gutted hulk was The Islander, Grenada's first tourist hotel, which catered to stray countesses and other European prodigals after World War II. Last winter, shouldering past curtains of vines and jagged chunks of concrete, I came across the kidney-shaped swimming pool, still blue beneath a layer of glistening slime, wedged into the hillside beneath a sun-parched, circular terrace. There I met Freddy, an unemployed carpenter with a bouquet of rasta locks held by a rubber band atop his head—"It's nice here. You want a quick sleep, you come on up and weeze out"—and the thickly bearded Spencer, who lives beneath the terrace in an abandoned security bunker from where, he says, Grenadian soldiers fired back at the Cobras.

Freddy accompanied me to Bishop's old office, where he fell silent, running his sinewy hands up and down his forearms until I was ready to leave. Up a flight of buckled stairs, past a landing reduced to a skeleton of rusting steel rods, we found ourselves in what Freddy said had been a dining room. From there we could take in all of St. George's, a once compact town of church spires and orange-tiled roofs that over the years has climbed into the surrounding foothills. "Maurice was alright, mon. But he had those people around him," Freddy said, cocking his head at the Richmond Hill Prison, the dull yellow, slab-like structure built on a towering ridge by the British two centuries ago. He was referring to its most notorious inmates: Bernard Coard, the chunky, Stalinist intellectual, his wife, Phyllis, the Jamaica-born heiress to the Tía María fortune, and their cohorts in the Revolutionary Military Council, who in October 1983 put Bishop under house arrest after denouncing him for "right opportunism" and, in Phyllis's words, display-

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ing "too much humanitarianism."

The Coards hated Bishop because he stood in the way of Bernard's ambition to take full control of the NJM and the state. They hated him, too, because so many Grenadians loved him—not because Bishop was a Marxist or a personal friend of Castro but because he walked among them, ate at their tables and imbued them with a sense of dignity and national belonging that had been denied by Eric Gairy, the UFO-obsessed autocrat overthrown by the NJM in 1979. When word got out that Bishop had been detained, thousands marched through the streets of St. George's to where he was held and freed him. They hung close, chanting "No Bishop, no revo," when he and loyal aides sought to regroup at Fort Rupert—renamed for Bishop's father, killed by Gairy's police—just across the harbor from Butler House. And thousands more were still streaming down from the mountains when units of the People's Revolutionary Army controlled by Coard overran the fort, lined up Bishop and his associates in the inner courtyard of the citadel, and executed them with automatic weapons.

Coard and company were arrested by the Marines, convicted of murder in a Grenadian court and now are serving life sentences. For that, most Grenadians remain grateful. Many are less sanguine about the restoration of vote-buying democracy, what Bishop scorned as "rum and corned beef politics." Ideologically opposed to the parliamentary system, Bishop did not hold an election during his four and a half years in power. Ironically, he is the only Grenadian politician who could ever have won one without spending a nickel on a campaign.

In the first elections after the invasion, the conservative-led coalition favored by Washington coasted to victory on a blanket of U.S. aid. With the end of the cold war, U.S. assistance dried up and Grenada was left to the mercy of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Structural adjustment meant fewer goodies to pass around at election time, and in 1995, Keith Mitchell, a right-leaning populist reminiscent of Gairy, squeaked into office. By then, the English-speaking Caribbean was no longer on Washington's screen—"After all, you're talking about a market of only six million people," a State Department official said to me not long ago.

Now, Grenada and the other small island-nations in the region find themselves whipsawed between giant commercial blocs in North America and Europe. The latest manifestation is the trade war waged by the Clinton administration—on behalf of Carl Lindner, the deep-pocketed Chiquita honcho and Lincoln Bedroom guest—against the European Union's preferential treatment of Caribbean banana growers. With agriculture in decline generally, wracked by swings in the global commodities casino, island governments have been left to scramble for the tourist dollar.

Back on the terrace, Freddy was ribbing Spencer. "Mon, you need to check your real estate agent. The Yugoslavia mafia ha' come and buy your house." Not exactly. The Blue Lagoon hotel and yacht club, which is to rise from the rubble of Butler House, is being financed by Viktor Kozeny, the Czech-born, Harvard-educated entrepreneur nicknamed the "Pirate of Prague" by *Fortune* magazine after he allegedly looted the Czech Republic's privatization program and, in the process, the life savings of tens of thousands of small Czech investors. After being fined a pittance by bumbling Czech authorities, Kozeny absconded to the Bahamas to become one of the growing number of global buccaneers and offshore hustlers taking advantage of the economically vulnerable Caribbean. Names on the boards of his various financial groups include or have included former U.S. Senator George Mitchell and former White House chief of staff John Sununu.

Kozeny is to plow $140 million into Blue Lagoon, the equivalent of nearly half Grenada's annual gross domestic product. He has pledged a few million more for "tourism marketing," and in 1998 flew Prime Minister Mitchell and his entourage to Europe on his Challenger jet. In return, Mitchell last August named Kozeny an ambassador at large, which, according to Mitchell's personal letter of confirmation, grants Kozeny "all normal diplomatic privileges and immunities," furnishing a thicker coat of protection than the ordinary passport Kozeny acquired from Ireland in exchange for investments there.

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Two weeks before Kozeny's appointment, Fidel Castro toured the Caribbean to thank governments for condemning the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba. Cuba now is no less dependent on tourism than its newly found friends, and where Castro once sought to promote revolution, he now advocates developing "multidestinational aspects of our main tourist resources." That was small consolation for the struggling Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement (MBPM), a handful of former NJMers led by Cuban-trained physician Terry Marryshow. Marryshow is a decent man and a fine doctor whose fundamental problem is that he is not Maurice Bishop. The MBPM, with few resources, received a few hundred votes in the recent elections, which were won in a landslide by Mitchell and his now well-heeled political machine.

Since the 1980s Marryshow has promoted two causes: renaming Grenada's international airport—begun by Cuba and completed by the United States—for Maurice Bishop, and mounting a plaque there to honor the Cuban construction workers killed resisting the U.S. invasion. Out of Castro's visit, Marryshow managed to get the plaque. At the unveiling, Mitchell noted the importance of the facility to the tourist industry. The prime minister, who spent the revolution excoriating Bishop and the Cubans from his perch at Howard University in Washington D.C., then took the opportunity to poke the Clinton administration in the eye by hailing Castro as "one of the most distinguished and dedicated leaders of the twentieth century."

Meanwhile, another notable makeover appeared to be underway up at Richmond Hill, where Bernard Coard and his collaborators have been campaigning for an early release. In an open letter published by a local newspaper, they expressed "profound regrets," endorsed "constitutional rights," and, to show that they were wise to the state of play in today's Grenada, vowed that if freed they would "assist our country in whatever way possible, e.g. by mobilizing investors, tourists and aid for our country." Freddy told me that when he heard that, he said to Spencer, "Comrade Coard, mon, he lookin' for a job with that Yugoslavia mafia." ●

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Inequality in Latin America

Forrest D. Colburn

EVERY YEAR the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) publishes a monograph titled *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America*. Most years the reports address a particular theme, some of them of narrow interest. Reading them can be tedious; they are written by economists who favor a matter-of-fact style. But the reports invariably contain a wealth of information. Especially compelling is the 1998-1999 report, a monumental study of inequality in Latin America, entailing a staggering amount of work. But the report is especially useful because it addresses issues that have been overshadowed by a flurry of attention to the region's financial markets: the stability of currencies, the interest rates set by central banks, the movement of capital, debt-repayment schedules, and, above all, the rise and fall of stock markets.

For the overwhelming majority of Latin Americans, "economic issues" are immediate and family-centered. Who works, where, and with what remuneration? Mostly, remuneration is low. The countries of Latin America suffer from extreme income inequality. The largest and most populous country—Brazil—has one of the widest income gaps in the world: the wealthiest 10 percent of the population amass almost 50 percent of national income, while the poorest 50 percent of the population scrape together little more than 10 percent.

The most inequitable countries, besides Brazil, are Chile, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, and Paraguay. By regional standards, Costa Rica and Uruguay have less inequity. For the region at large: the wealthiest 5 percent of the population receive 25 percent of national income; the wealthiest 10 percent receive 40 percent. By contrast, the poorest 30 percent of the population receive only 7.5 percent of total income, less than anywhere else in the world.

These bald statistics are arrived at from an analysis of household surveys from fourteen countries accounting for more than 80 percent of the region's population. The surveys were done between 1994 and 1996. Sample sizes were large: in Peru, for example, 16,744 households were queried, providing data about 88,863 Peruvians. Data from these surveys were compared to data from earlier surveys, leading to the unhappy conclusion that inequality in Latin America worsened considerably in the 1980s and has remained stagnant at high levels in the 1990s. Finally, comparisons with other parts of the world are facilitated by international data bases prepared by such organizations as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IDB report not only goes to unprecedented lengths to measure inequality rigorously but also documents its deadly implication: widespread poverty. The income level of more than 150 million Latin Americans—roughly one-third of the population—is under U.S. $2 a day (corrected for differences of purchasing power of the different currencies). And $2 is the meager sum regarded as the minimum needed to cover basic consumption needs. Thus, although the World Bank and the IMF judge per capita incomes in Latin America to be high enough to warrant the region's being labeled "middle-income," a third of the population barely subsists.

The economists who wrote the study acknowledge that there is inequality everywhere. But they argue that Latin America has *excess* inequality. Other regions with similar levels of "development" have substantially less poverty. If Latin America had the income distribution suited to its level of development by international standards, the incidence of poverty

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would be half of what it actually is today. Per capita income levels of Eastern European countries are not appreciably different from those of Latin America, but only 7 percent of their population is poor. Admittedly, the communist history of Eastern Europe strains the comparison. But comparisons with other regions lead to a similar conclusion. For example, if income in Latin America were distributed as it is in the countries of Southeast Asia, poverty would be reduced by four-fifths.

ACTUALLY, income distribution in Latin America is even worse than calculated by the IDB study. The household surveys measure only income from labor, not capital (such as rental properties and other kinds of investments). Still, the measurement of income from labor (and other data from the household surveys) provides insight into the Latin American rich. The rich are numerous; a class, not a clan, of tight-knit families. They are well educated, working as professionals and managers of companies (in which they may or may not have equity). Wives tend to work, and to earn a good income. Families are small, with an average of just 1.4 children.

The poor have poor educations. Twenty-three percent of Latin Americans are "uneducated." The average Latin American over twenty-five years of age has only 4.8 years of education. Three-fourths of Latin Americans over twenty-five years of age have either no education or, more likely today, only a few years in a primary (elementary) school. The poor never make it to school or attend school only briefly. The households of the poor are large; the poorest 30 percent of Latin Americans have an average of 6.3 members in their household. The poor have more children, an average of 3.3. And households are more likely to include additional adult dependents (such as grandparents). Hence, per capita income is lower for poor families not only because earnings are less, but also because they have more individuals to support.

Most of the poor still live in the countryside. Only in Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela do more than half of all households of the poorest 30 percent live in urban areas. The urban slums of the poor can be even more depressing—and dangerous—than the forsaken rural settlements, but, it is notable that the majority of the poor continue to live in the countryside. In contrast, nine out of ten families in the two highest income deciles live in cities.

Left unexamined in the report is the daily life of the poor. But how can one convey a sense for what it means to be poor for 150 million people? My own scattered conversations with the poor lead me to believe that any attempt has to include more than a description of misery and wretchedness. Poverty entails, too, emotional pressures—for example, of fear and worry. Sometimes there is despair, humiliation, or rage. Poverty is profoundly threatening. It takes a constant toll on one's equilibrium and frequently, too, on family ties. Finally, the burden of poverty is different, and greater, in Latin America, because the munificence of the few is a constant reminder that life could be more bountiful. Moreover, the wealthy, as employers, are frequently demanding, miserly, and insensitive. At the same time, the poor have their "weapons of the weak": false compliance, dissimulation, foot dragging, and sabotage. There is a never-ending struggle—what James Scott has called "the small arms fire of class war." The social landscape is treacherous.

Why is Latin America so inequitable? The authors of the Development Bank study offer two theories, but neither is persuasive. One explanation is that Latin America is at an early stage of economic development where, for example, a scarcity of capital leads to high returns, which are a cause of income inequality. But as capital becomes more abundant, its returns fall vis-à-vis labor, helping to improve income distribution. Similarly, the present low levels of schooling entail high returns for the few who are educated. With continued economic growth, the expansion of education, and other good things, the distribution of income should improve. This line of reasoning sounds plausible. But empirical studies have shown that when countries, like the Philippines, begin with inequality, after several decades of economic growth they remain highly inegalitarian. This outcome also fits the experience of Latin America. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Latin America was inegalitarian. After a century of economic growth, it is still inegali-

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tarian. Why should another half century or even another century lead—by itself—to a reversal?

Another explanation for Latin America's inequality—and by extension of the poverty of so many Latin Americans—is the region's endowment of natural resources. This explanation is surprising. But evidence is marshaled to show that countries with large amounts of agricultural land per capita are substantially more unequal than countries with little land per capita. Similarly, countries that rely upon large exports of primary commodities are also substantially more unequal than countries with lower primary commodity exports. But it is hard to believe that abundance is a burden or that there is something pernicious about either tropical fruits or coffee. What is missing from the analysis is an appreciation of the politics of inequality.

Neither of the two explanations is pushed very far. The bankers and economists of the Inter-American Development Bank aren't really interested in explaining the causes of inequality in Latin America. In any case, solutions do not leap from their analysis. Latin America's severe income inequality is connected to its level of development and to the characteristics of its natural resource endowment. That would seem to provide a twofold reason for doing nothing: the first implies waiting and the second resignation.

But the IDB is an activist organization, committed to fostering "development." Resignation is not allowed. Income inequality must be redressed. And redress is to come from the state: "Income distribution in Latin American countries will depend heavily on government in the next century."

The authors' logic is curious. In explaining the causes of inequality, they look to distant, impersonal, exogenous variables: the "stage of development" and natural resource endowment. Issues of authority and power are slighted. Those who have long held the reins of power in the economy and the state are not held accountable. But if the serious problem of inequality—and the poverty it begets—is to be redressed, then, yes, we need to look at the management of the economy and the state.

During the recession that battered Latin America in the 1980s, the worst since the 1930s, "international development organizations" had considerable leverage over policy design and implementation in Latin America. There were four powerful institutions, all based in Washington, D.C.: the World Bank, the IMF, the IDB, and the United States Agency for International Development (AID). In what came to be known as the "Washington Consensus," there was a pitch for Latin American governments to attain macro-economic stability, reining in the government deficits that had fueled inflation. Government spending was slashed and, to a lesser extent, taxes were raised. The same four institutions promoted economic "liberalization," ending government intervention in the economy to leave markets "free." Since many government interventions, such as maintaining unprofitable state enterprises or offering subsidies to consumers, added to budget deficits, "liberalization" was seen as crucial to fiscal responsibility. Trade policy was also "liberalized," as were controls on foreign investment. These latter measures were said to contribute handsomely to economic growth.

Beaten down by debt and inflation, Latin American governments were receptive to a new paradigm. The old statist model was thoroughly discredited in the 1980s. In country after country, when there was a change of political regime—and sometimes even before—central bankers and finance ministers followed the prescriptions of the "international donor community." And, poof, they worked: macro-economic stability (a euphemism for low rates of inflation) was attained throughout the region, even in countries, like Brazil, Bolivia, and Nicaragua, that had been wracked by hyper-inflation.

But fiscal restraint and economic "liberalization" appear to have been oversold: many people, in and out of government, came to believe that these policies would be a panacea for all economic woes, including the poverty afflicting a third of Latin Americans. Throughout the 1990s, Latin American countries have enjoyed moderate rates of economic growth. Nonetheless, income distribution has not improved. The poor remain poor.

So international organizations now call for a "second generation" of reforms to address

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pressing social needs: education, health care, and income generation for the poor. Public opinion surveys suggest that Latin Americans are supportive of these reforms. For example, at least four out of five think that government has a responsibility to "reduce the differences between the rich and the poor." An even higher percentage of Latin Americans thinks that government ought to accept responsibility for "providing health care to the sick" as well as "a decent standard of living" for old people and the unemployed. A philosophical endorsement of ambitious government efforts to provide redress for the poor comes from an essay by Mario Vargas Llosa titled "*América Latina y la opción liberal*." He makes a forceful argument that liberal democracy and capitalism are only defensible if there is equal opportunity for all. Especially important, he suggests, is equality before the law and in education.

International development organizations make a well-reasoned case for social reform in Latin America. And the majority of Latin Americans appear to endorse at least the idea of these reforms. But despite occasional rhetoric to the contrary, little is being done to provide social services—education in particular—that might help the poor improve their position. The so-called "second generation reforms" are not forthcoming. No doubt, government and economic elites are distracted by the continuing struggle to maintain macro-economic stability. No doubt, the challenge of meeting the needs of the poor is daunting; a Herculean effort is necessary and no government has an abundance of political capital. But it is also true that there isn't much empathy for the poor; the political will to redress inequality hardly exists.

In the world's richest countries (which tend to have a more equitable distribution of income), government spending represents around 40 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). In contrast, Latin America, with the world's worst distribution of income, is also the region where governments are smallest. Government spending represents about 20 percent of GDP. The scope of government is limited by difficulties in taxing those who have something that might be taxed. Income tax rates in Latin America are the lowest in the world. The IDB suggests that "Low collection rates for income and other taxes in Latin America reflect the limited institutional capacity of public administration to enforce the law." That interpretation has merit, but it needs to be complemented by an understanding of the political constraints produced by economic inequality.

To be sure, throughout Latin America there are programs to aid the poor. But most often they pale before the challenge. And when efforts are ambitious, they are usually driven by political calculation. For example, with only a year to go before standing for reelection as president of Peru—an opportunity made possible only by rewriting the constitution—Alberto Fujimori suddenly embarked upon a dramatic expansion of social spending. Fujimori profited politically by having the media portray him, wearing a poncho, visiting remote Andean communities to inaugurate schools or other "public works." The political manipulation of social spending, much of it financed by the sale of state assets, was blatant. It was, as is said in Latin America, "*un* show." Mexico's *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* has been similarly criticized.

The IDB report highlights the importance of improving access to education for reducing inequality in Latin America. It is true that slowly the poor are becoming better educated. Illiteracy is being eradicated and the average number of years of schooling is slowly being increased. But the real dynamism in Latin American education is in the growth of professional training for the sons and daughters of the elite. Many of today's professionals are children whose parents already enjoyed a comfortable status in agriculture, industry, commerce, or construction. Here is a story the report doesn't tell. The upper class of Latin America has a remarkable gift for self-preservation and has been quick to realize that in our era the most valuable—and the safest—capital is human capital. Meeting the need for quality higher education are many new private universities, found throughout the major cities of the region. They are good, they are expensive, and they are most definitely not agencies of equality. ●

FORREST D. COLBURN is completing a book about Latin America at "the end of history."

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Bankruptcy and Zeal

The Republican Dialectic

Sean Wilentz

Now that the dust has started to settle, it's time to assess why the congressional Republicans, in the face of overwhelmingly hostile public opinion, pursued the impeachment of President Clinton to the bitter end. Overwrought idealism was partly responsible, as was the intimidation of more moderate members by the hard-line party leadership, as were the whims of fortune. But one of the dirty secrets of impeachment may be that the Republicans had nothing better to do. By setting their sights on removing an already besmirched Bill Clinton, Republicans unwittingly exposed their party's intellectual bankruptcy, especially at the national level. And by pursuing impeachment as zealously as they did, they compounded that bankruptcy by alienating millions of voters.

The turnabout is astonishing. For nearly two decades, Republicans and their allied think tanks and policy packaging firms had seemingly swept aside most traces of oppositional thinking. Dependable liberal battle cries—for state-stimulated full employment, advancing racial integration, and more—grew fainter by the year. The very idea of activist government, outside the realm of foreign affairs, became fatal to the touch. Republican panaceas, from the supply-side Laffer curve to the "just-say-no" anti-drug policy, did not exactly work their magic, but neither did their failure seem to discredit the Republicans' working assumptions, fiercely libertarian with respect to economic policy and fiercely moralistic with respect to social policy. "We've largely won the battle of ideas," Kate O'Beirne, formerly of the Heritage Foundation, recently boasted. "We are in the implementation stage right now." Indeed, some commentators claim that that Republican thinking infected the Democrats as well, especially inside the Clinton White House—though this reasoning makes it difficult to understand why so many Republicans, and virtually all hard-line conservatives, hate Clinton so deeply. Yet today, poll after poll shows that the public is fed up with the right-wing moralizers, has no particular interest in tax cuts, and fears that the Republicans will undermine popular universal entitlements.

The Republicans' intellectual crisis cannot be blamed on complacency. Indeed, faith in what Irving Kristol once referred to as the inverted Gramscianism of the modern GOP—that is, control the prevailing view of reality and you control politics—has only deepened during the Clinton years. According to a recent report by the left-liberal National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), the nation's twenty leading conservative policy institutions have more than doubled their combined budgets since 1992, spending $158 million in 1996 alone—$20 million more than the Republican Party raised and spent during that election year in soft-money contributions. The five best-known institutions on the NCRP's list (the Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institution, Center for Strategic and International Studies, American Enterprise Institute, and Free Congress Research and Education Foundation) accounted for about half of the total in 1996; the rest was lavished on smaller, tightly focused groups, each dedicated to advancing core elements of the conservative agenda. By attracting increased contributions from the corporate sector, and by tightening their connections with political operatives (in Washington and the states) as well as with grassroots activists, this conglomeration of organizations has turned policy advocacy on the right into something like a permanent, well-coordinated, national political campaign.

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Yet in the immediate aftermath of the impeachment struggle, it looked as if the GOP's research-and-promotion efforts had succumbed to the law of diminishing returns. The prospects were especially grim for the party's social-conservative wing. Since 1978, when the activist Paul Weyrich and his allies invented the Moral Majority, Republicans had built an invaluable new base among politicized conservative evangelicals. Even when public displeasure at the GOP televangelists mounted late in the Reagan years, and even after the Moral Majority disbanded, a more secular version of moral majoritarianism gained vast exposure and considerable momentum, thanks to publicists like William Bennett and operations like the Free Congress Foundation. In this version, America's chief problems were moral, not economic or political; they stemmed from the cultural relativism and permissiveness imposed by a relatively small but powerful 1960s left; and they could be measured by the breakdown of fundamental social institutions, above all the family.

This is not the occasion to ponder how the twists and turns of liberal politics gave intellectual hostages to the right-wing cultural warriors. What is plain is that, although Bennett's books and others' may still soar to the top of the bestseller lists, there is now despair on the cultural right, not just about their political strategy but about their very conception of the nation. After all their efforts, abortion remains legal and the National Endowment for the Arts exists. During the presidency of the despised baby-boomer Clinton, the right wing's key statistical markers of the nation's cultural breakdown—violent crime, out-of-wedlock births, divorce, drunk driving, expanding welfare rolls—not only failed to worsen; they actually improved. Despite Clinton's gross stupidity with Monica Lewinsky and his attempts to deceive—which many right-wing commentators reasonably considered political manna from heaven—a rock-solid majority of the public remained in the president's corner against his accusers. And when push came to shove in the impeachment trial, the cultural right, although capable of overawing the House Republican caucus, could not make a convincing constitutional argument that Clinton's misdeeds warranted his removal from office.

Some veterans of the lost cause have put on a brave face and vowed to soldier on. The Reverend Pat Robertson made headlines late in the impeachment drama when he conceded tactical defeat—prematurely, in the eyes of some of his followers. Yet Robertson still insists that if religious voters would rally to elect "an evangelical, born again president" and a like-minded Congress, "we could roll back many of the bad things that have been done in government." The Reverend Jerry Falwell agrees, as do the Republican presidential hopeful Gary Bauer (who is running against what he calls "the virtue deficit") and James Dobson of Focus on the Family. ("Never give in," Dobson has proclaimed, waxing Churchillian; "never, never, never.")

Other influential conservatives, however, have admitted to their confusion after impeachment and have called for, at the very least, a reappraisal of their culture war assumptions. "A lot of people are angry that [Clinton] got off," Phyllis Schlafly, head of the Eagle Forum, remarked last February. "They just don't understand it. They're shaking their heads: what is the problem?" Schlafly still believes that a majority of Americans share her ultraconservative moral values, but criticizes the Republican Congress for being too "defensive" in vindicating those values—a most ungrateful complaint, it would seem, coming after Monicagate. William Bennett, who reads the polls as closely as he says he reads his Aquinas, is much less confident of public backing. Shocked at what he has called, with his characteristic modesty, the first divergence ever between his own point of view and that of the American majority, Bennett now demands a tragic consideration of what he has labeled "the death of outrage." Other cultural warriors have suggested that it may be too late even for that. In his last-ditch arguments during the Senate impeachment trial, Representative Henry Hyde sounded an apocalyptic chord: "I wonder if, after this culture war is over that we are engaged in," Hyde declared, "an America will survive that will be worth fighting to defend." With Clinton acquitted,

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presumably, the end is ever more nigh.

Overtaken by failure, some generals in the GOP cultural army have even called for a dignified surrender, an Appomattox. "I no longer believe that there is a moral majority," Paul Weyrich, now head of the Free Congress Foundation, told his fellow conservative leaders after the impeachment trial. In place of political action, he counseled "separation" from society by promoting home schooling, the formation of private courts of justice, and removing televisions from decent homes. Shortly thereafter, Cal Thomas (the syndicated columnist and former Moral Majority spokesman) and the Reverend Ed Dobson (a former Falwell aide) went even further, claiming in a new book, *Blinded by Might*, that the Moral Majority, indeed the entire effort to elevate moralism through politics, had been wrongheaded from the start. For Thomas, the problems besetting the religious right have, in part, to do with their own cultural style. Conservatives, he has remarked, are "an upset people. We don't like being happy. We're always looking for an enemy—just as the left is—to play on people's fears, which increases cynicism." More to the point, he and Dobson contend that politics was never their proper arena. "Religious conservatives, no matter how well organized, can't save America," they write. "Only God can." And so, they conclude, conservative Christians should go back to their churches and convert the world the old-fashioned way, one sinner at a time.

Insofar as Weyrich, Thomas, and Dobson (Ed, not James) reflect religious conservative opinion in general—which is not self-evident—their abdication may mark a resurgence of the antipolitical stance that had traditionally dominated conservative American evangelicalism. (In the 1980s, among the harshest critics of the so-called religious right were the fundamentalist leaders of institutions such as Bob Jones University, who insisted that involvement in politics would do far more damage to the word of God than the word of God could ever do to redeem politics.) But what is truly striking is how, along with their more secular and more hopeful erstwhile allies, the cultural warriors gaze with utter horror on how most Americans think and live.

For Weyrich, the "ever-wider sewer" that is America is "caught up in a collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics." Likewise for the journalist P.J. O'Rourke, who is more of a dandy than a doomsday man, the mere sight of ordinary Americans is nauseating: "masses waddling into airports, business offices and churches dressed in drooping sweats or fuschia warm-up suits or mainsail-sized Bermuda shorts, each with a mobile phone in one ear and a Walkman in the other and sucking Diet Pepsi through a straw." Add to that the conceit, heard everywhere in the mainstream as well as the conservative press during the impeachment hearings, that the booming economy has corrupted our collective sense of moral virtue, and you have the sort of condemnation of America that one has gotten used to hearing mainly from young suburban malcontents and Left Bank leftists. Ronald Reagan's sunny "It's Morning in America" has given way to fear and loathing on the right.

THE SPITEFULNESS of the cultural right is matched by the increasingly far-fetched ideas proffered by the other major wing of the Republican party, the economic conservatives. With American capitalism booming, the Dow bouncing well above 10,000, unemployment down, the federal budget in surplus, and the welfare bogeyman seemingly scotched—all under a Democratic administration—it is hard for the economic conservatives to gain much political traction. About all they are left with, in the realm of ideas, are proposals for tax cuts. These ideas, however, are far less attractive than they once were, given the public perception of looming crises in Social Security and Medicare. And the proposals themselves, although neatly packaged as economic lifesavers for the average American, are more obviously than ever windfalls for the rich.

Part of the economic conservatives' packaging involves overstating the federal tax burden currently borne by middle-class families. In her response to the president's State of the Union address last January, for example, Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn stated that a typical two-earner household pays nearly 40 percent of its income in taxes, a figure extrapo-

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lated from computations that more than 25 percent of that income goes to federal taxes—"the highest percentage of income ever paid in taxes by American families." Yet as Iris J. Lav has reported for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, these findings are based on arbitrary statistical methods that, among other things, set median two-earner family income at nearly $55,000—far above the Congressional Budget Office's median figure of $39,000. Using the CBO's methods, the actual average family federal tax burden comes to 18.9 percent in 1999, substantially less than Congresswoman Dunn suggests. Moreover, CBO figures show that the portion of income paid in federal taxes by families in the middle-income levels in 1999 will be slightly lower than the same figure for 1977. To be sure, it appears that the federal government has been collecting more taxes in recent years, as a percentage of the gross domestic product. But those increases are due largely to an extraordinary rise in capital gains income received by wealthier Americans as the stock market has boomed. The tax burdens of most Americans have been unaffected.

Dunn's inflated figures, however, served a larger purpose, which was to win support for congressional Republican leaders' first grand new proposal of the post-impeachment era—an across-the-board 10 percent cut in tax rates. By referring to the plan simply as a 10 percent tax cut (an elision dutifully repeated in the press), Republicans made it sound as if all Americans would benefit equally. But it took little economic expertise to see that, under our system, a cut in tax rates is far more regressive than a simple cut in taxes. Soon after the Republicans announced their plan, Citizens for Tax Justice reported that more than 60 percent of the benefits would go to the ten percent of taxpayers with the highest incomes. On average, the tax reduction for the lower 60 percent of all taxpayers—those with incomes below $38,000—would amount to $99. A large portion of low- and moderate-income families would receive no cut at all. By contrast, the top 10 percent of the income distribution would get, on average, nearly $4,000 a year, while the top 1 percent would get, on average, more than $20,000 per year. The inequities were so blatant that the Democrats did not need to put up much of a fight: faced with grumbling from their moderate members, the Republican leaders shelved their grand new proposal shortly after they announced it.

The death of the GOP 10 percent plan did not, to be sure, mark the utter extinction of Republican thinking. Remarkably, though, what remains consists chiefly of ideologically charged reworkings of Democratic proposals or rehashes of familiar Republican ideas. The White House proposes to set aside $1.8 trillion over the next decade to strengthen Social Security, while investing a portion of the surplus in the stock market; the Republicans come up with their own plan, setting aside roughly the same amount of money but creating private investment accounts within the retirement system. The White House proposes to increase spending on defense and education; so do the Republicans, though they would channel much more to defense and much less to education. If all else fails, the GOP still has some old chestnuts in its pantry, including tort reform, school vouchers, and renewed attacks on affirmative action. Yet although the Democrats may be vulnerable here and there on these matters, it is hard to believe that the Republicans can successfully jerry-build an entire electoral program out of them, as they did in 1994. And at least some of the old reliable Republican ideas—opposing gun control, for example—may now cost more political support than they gain.

Embittered about America, reduced to promoting regressive tax cuts as their big new idea, the Republicans are suffering from the political fragmentation that normally accompanies intellectual exhaustion. The fragmentation is nothing new. For some years, more moderate northeastern Republicans have been trying to distance themselves from the cultural die-hards. Shortly after the Senate acquitted Clinton, several of these moderates, most notably New York's Governor George Pataki, tried to round up support around the country for taking the party in a less moralistic direction. But those efforts achieved little more than to show how the party divisions had deepened during the impeachment drive. The

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GOP's early lineup of presidential hopefuls is indicative of the party's plight. The cultural conservatives have fielded Gary Bauer and Alan Keyes; Congressman John Kasich has jumped in as an updated Reaganomist; Lamar Alexander has centered his campaign on the "character" issue; Dan Quayle is hoping his graying temples will lend his candidacy credibility; Pat Buchanan is once more agitating the "lock and load" constituency; and Steve Forbes, having learned a few lessons from his failed bid in 1996, has enthusiastically courted the religious right while pushing his own regressive economic panacea, the flat tax—thereby combining two streams of thought that have nearly dried up.

No wonder the Republican Establishment is looking elsewhere for a candidate—above all, to reliable members of the Establishment family who are unburdened with much intellectual baggage of any kind. It is a remarkable fact that in every presidential year save one since 1952, the Republican national ticket has included either a Nixon, a Dole, or a Bush. Looking to 2000, Republicans get to choose between yet another Bush and yet another Dole (and, quite possibly, get a Bush-Dole ticket)—a son and a wife, neither identified in the national mind with anything more profound than their congenial personalities and family crests.

All of which might point to deep and lasting trouble ahead for the GOP were the Democrats and their liberal allies in better intellectual shape than they are. To be sure, impeachment and its aftermath has created far more authentic solidarity in Democratic ranks than has been seen in many years. Vice President Al Gore will face no serious challenge from his left for his party's nomination, and unless he stumbles badly, or unless the Kosovo mess becomes an unmitigated political disaster, he ought to gain the nod over Bill Bradley with a minimum of the traditional Democratic blood-letting. Lingering fury at the Republicans over impeachment, and promises for a more focused campaign to take back the House, look like they will galvanize recently listless Democratic constituencies to donate heavily and get out the vote. Yet it remains far easier to say what the Democrats stand against than what they stand for. The much-lamented tendency of liberal and left philanthropies to spread their funding thin, along with the lack of anything resembling a robust and well-coordinated party intelligentsia, connected with the party's base, still places the Democrats at an enormous disadvantage when it comes to shaping public perceptions. Efforts in that direction, under the broad heading of "the Third Way," have been sporadic and ambiguous, sometimes registering with the public as old-fashioned moderate Republicanism, sometimes as revamped social democracy, and sometimes as a renunciation of any ideas or goals beyond small-bore policy initiatives.

THE WORST thing that the Democrats could decide, under these circumstances, is that ideas don't really matter in politics. All that has happened in national affairs over the last thirty years proves just the opposite. The Republicans may be exhausted—but until now their inverted Gramscianism has proven enormously effective in shaping the terms of public debate. Bill Clinton has outmaneuvered them—but Democrats in general cannot count on fancy political footwork and co-optation to fulfill the function of a political creed. If the Republicans are intellectually bankrupt, the Democrats have barely begun to invest in their intellectual future, even though they have managed to gain a popular majority in a national election only once in the last thirty-five years. Unless the Democrats start making those investments, the Republicans' current intellectual breakdown may well prove a squandered opportunity.

Still, there is something comforting in the fact that all the money in the world doesn't seem to be able to guarantee credible political thinking. After all these years, behind the veneer of Reagan's uplifting patriotism and (for a time) Gingrich's "opportunity society" bombast, modern Republicanism turns out to be little more than a set of intellectual atavisms, intolerance linked with attempts to further enrich the already rich. And all of the GOP's would-be kings, and all of their horses and all of their men, seem, for once, clueless. ●

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Mosaics and Melting Pots

George M. Fredrickson

Debates about ethnic diversity are now a common feature of the political landscape. The term "multiculturalism" enjoys currency among those who welcome, or are resigned to, a decline in the type of cultural homogeneity usually associated with the classic nation-state. The fashionable American conception of multiculturalism emphasizes fluid identities and boundaries. In the Fall 1998 issue of *Dissent*, Will Kymlicka ("American Multiculturalism in the International Arena") argues that this American notion does not travel well to countries with large, territorially based "national minorities"—groups that have, usually by conquest, been incorporated against their will into a multinational state. Even the United States, he points out here and in his book *Multicultural Citizenship*, has national minorities and has acknowledged their limited sovereignty with collective rights unavailable to immigrants—in effect, firming up their identities and boundaries.

Kymlicka is correct to point out that the United States is, despite itself and contrary to its self-conception, a multinational state. The inhabitants of Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa, as well as Native Americans living on reservations and the Inuit of Alaska, have special claims to territory and self-government. A burgeoning movement among native Hawaiians is demanding similar recognition and a land base to go with it. But the cultural distinctiveness, remoteness, and relatively small populations of such groups have left them out of most discussions of American pluralism. In the nineteenth century, to be sure, there was an effort at what amounted to the forced assimilation of Native Americans. But by the early twentieth century this dream faded, both because Indians themselves refused to commit cultural suicide and because the rise of scientific racism among whites concerned with Indian affairs encouraged a belief that Indians, like blacks and Asians, were unassimilable for genetic reasons.

Multiculturalists usually include Native Americans among the groups whose distinctive cultures deserve to be respected and preserved. But the fact that Indian tribes do have territorial bases, inadequate though they may be, and a special legal and constitutional status based on treaties with the U. S. government makes their situation and prospects quite different from those of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Immigrants, Kymlicka points out, have made a voluntary decision to move from one nation to another. National minorities, on the other hand, have been forced to accept alien rule. Consequently, justice for them may require, as it does not for voluntary immigrants, the right to special forms of communal self-government and group representation.

Canada, unlike the United States, has a large territorially based national minority—the French speakers of Quebec. Hence its fundamental political arrangements require a special status for one of its provinces if Canada is to remain one nation. The closest American analog is New Mexico, with a substantial Spanish-speaking population that was supposedly guaranteed full American citizenship by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 but often saw its rights trampled by the Anglo settlers who eventually became a majority. The state constitution continues to prescribe bilingualism for some limited purposes, but visitors to that state will see little evidence of it. Justice for U.S. national minorities and indigenous populations is a moral

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imperative, but it is not a requirement for the survival of the Union itself, as is the case in Canada.

Multicultural Models

Civic cohesiveness in the United States depends primarily on adjusting successfully to the diversity that has been created by past and present immigration, voluntary in the case of Asians and Mexicans and involuntary in the case of African Americans. Can one model of multiculturalism work both for non-European immigrants who have come recently and voluntarily and also for those who were brought much earlier in chains for forced labor? A few cross-national examples may help to answer this question.

The United States shares with several other industrialized countries the question of how to manage the diversity created by immigration from what used to be called the third world and whether or not an increase in cultural heterogeneity can be reconciled with national self-images inherited from the past. Debates over the meaning, desirability, and legal or political implications of "multiculturalism" are common to the nations of Western Europe, and to the British Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Based on recent developments in some of these countries, one may detect a spectrum of responses to multiculturalism, ranging from Canada on one extreme to France and Germany on the other.

The Canadian government has officially endorsed multiculturalism to the extent of directly subsidizing institutions and organizations devoted to "cultural retention" and maintaining communal solidarity among immigrant groups. This policy is not, as is often supposed, the result of more egalitarian attitudes among white Canadians than can be found among whites in the United States. According to a recent study by two Canadian sociologists—*The Illusion of Difference: Realities of Ethnicity in Canada and the United States,* by Jeffrey G. Reitz and Raymond Breton—extensive survey data show surprisingly little difference between the basic attitudes of the white citizens of these two North American nations toward immigrants of color. Despite the myths that Canada is a "mosaic" and the United States a "melting pot," racial prejudice and xenophobia exist to about the same extent in both countries. Differences in public policy and discourse between Canada and the United States hinge on the ethnoracial climate *before* the large-scale nonwhite immigration of recent years. In Canada, the special status of Quebec has compelled a recognition of polyethnicity that sets a precedent for the toleration and even encouragement of the cultural diversity resulting from immigration. It is no accident, therefore, that the characteristic Canadian response to immigrant disadvantage is to promote the cultural autonomy and solidarity of ethnic groups.

In the United States, the volatile history of black-white relations tends to influence policy and attitudes toward Latino and Asian immigrants. Affirmative action, originally conceived as a response to the special disadvantages of African Americans, has been extended to some predominantly immigrant minorities. The current debate over the legitimacy of affirmative action is fueled in part by growing hostility to non-European immigration. If the current assault on affirmative action is successful, the United States will rely simply on the "free market" to provide the kind of opportunities for self-help that earlier European and some contemporary Asian immigrant groups have found sufficient for economic success and social mobility—if not for the immigrants themselves, at least for their children and grandchildren.

It is mostly the persistence of palpable black disadvantage that makes a majority of Americans continue to favor some form of "affirmative action," even if they are uneasy about straightforward "racial preferences." English-speaking Canadians, on the other hand, do not see why other minorities should not have the linguistic and cultural rights traditionally accorded to the *Québécois* even as they resist Quebec's demands for greater political autonomy.

"No Black in the Union Jack"

Since the 1950s, almost all Western European nations have received large numbers of immigrants from outside of Europe—in the case of

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the former imperial powers, mainly from their own former colonies. In the period of economic expansion and low unemployment between the mid-fifties and the late sixties, newcomers were welcomed as a necessary supplement to the domestic labor force, or more specifically as people to do the menial work that natives would no longer undertake. But the economic slowdown that began in the late sixties created tighter labor markets and a movement toward the restriction of immigration. This has stemmed the flow but left open the question of how to deal with the substantial numbers who were already there and wished to remain.

Anti-immigrant racism rose first in Britain in the heyday of Enoch Powell in the 1960s. During that decade Britain drastically restricted nonwhite immigration, but also passed new anti-discrimination laws to encourage the fair treatment of immigrants of color who were already resident in the United Kingdom.

THE AFRO-BRITISH sociologist and cultural critic Paul Gilroy, in his classic work *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, has traced the race problem in the United Kingdom to an insular nationalism that identifies Britishness with a distinctive physical type and way of life. The British have never been noted for receiving foreigners into their national community with open arms, and they have reserved their greatest revulsion for those who seemed to deviate most from the physical and cultural norms of the island's historic populations. Unlike American proponents of the "melting pot" or French advocates of total assimilation into the universal republic, they have rarely proclaimed or celebrated their capacity to "Anglicize" ethnic strangers. Thus prejudice based squarely on pigmentation appears to be stronger in Britain than in other Western European countries and has inhibited official recognition of ethnic differences among non-European immigrants. Popular racial terminology often designates both Afro-West Indians and South Asians as "blacks," thereby ignoring the cultural gulf between these two immigrant communities. A shared experience of discrimination has at times created a tenuous solidarity among people of color, and the egalitarian white left has generally endorsed this black-white view of British race relations.

Recently, however, a serious debate has developed about whether an American-style civil rights approach really makes sense for Britain. Representatives of the substantial Muslim minority from Pakistan and India have objected to being lumped together with West Indians as victims of prejudice based on skin color. They contend that religion rather than race is central to their identity and the main source of their disadvantage. They have therefore argued that Islam should be accorded the same legal status as Christianity. This is a thorny problem for British education, which requires some form of religious instruction in state-supported schools.

France and Germany

For reasons that are radically different in each case, Germany and France have provided relatively barren ground for the growth of any kind of multiculturalism. German identity and citizenship have traditionally been rooted in a relatively pure form of ethnic nationalism. Immigrants of remote German ancestry—for example the Volga Germans of Russia who left their German-speaking homelands in the eighteenth century—have been eligible for instant citizenship. On the other hand, the children and grandchildren of Turks who came as guest workers thirty or forty years ago are still regarded as foreigners and face many obstacles if they wish to become German nationals. The new social democratic government has made it somewhat easier for Turks born in Germany to become citizens, but its proposal to grant dual citizenship was withdrawn in the face of public disapproval. Up to now, German multiculturalism has taken the form of encouraging Turks to organize themselves as a "national minority" in order to bargain more effectively with the German state. Turkish leaders and anti-racist Germans have also advocated limited political rights for resident aliens, such as access to the municipal franchise.

Of course the United States long had a racial qualification for citizenship through naturalization. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Law of 1790, only free

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white immigrants were eligible for citizenship. As part of the post-emancipation reforms of the Reconstruction era, the privilege was extended to black newcomers, but it was not until World War II that Asians became eligible for naturalization. The Fourteenth Amendment made citizens of all persons born in the United States (except Indians on reservations, who had to wait until 1924). Since 1868, therefore, the rights of American nationality have been conferred automatically on the children of all immigrants, whatever their race or ethnicity. Recent proposals to deny citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants would break a long tradition and might require a constitutional amendment. America may have once had what amounted to a white racial nationalism that contradicted its founders' professions of civic nationalism. But it has never had, at least officially, a culturally based ethnic nationalism like the Germans.

FRENCH NATIONALISM, like the American, is professedly of the "civic" as opposed to the "ethnic" variety. Indeed, the French virtually invented the idea that a nation could be based on the equal rights and general will of all of its loyal inhabitants. Unlike Germany, France has long been an immigrant-receiving society. What has limited French toleration of other cultures is a powerful ethnocentrism that tends to regard French culture as a universal norm to which all immigrants, whatever their origin, should be able and willing to conform, at least in public. French policy and traditions make no distinction among immigrant groups. The only categories that matter are French citizens and foreigners. The rationalistic universalism of the republican left lacks respect for cultural particularity, especially if it takes a religious form, and the intolerance of the right extends to anything that is not traditionally French and Christian, preferably Catholic. The French left's state-supported universalist republicanism and the French right's unofficial cultural chauvinism are equally inhospitable to the idea of France as a multicultural nation.

The French government has nevertheless made some pragmatic adjustments to ethnic diversity. In 1981 the ban on cultural associations based on national origins was lifted, and these ethnic organizations have subsequently received public subsidies for activities that seem likely to facilitate the integration of their members into French society. But such policies have had the unintended effect of intensifying ethnic identities and thus impeding assimilation. The furor in 1989 over the Moroccan girls who wore head scarves to school brought out the hostility of much of the republican left to any expression of religious commitment in the public sphere and the nativist right's intolerance of Islam and prejudice against former colonial subjects. Eventually the government reluctantly granted the girls permission to wear the *chador* to school, and the nativist right promptly capitalized politically on what it described as an ignoble surrender to the Islamic assault on French culture and identity.

In his recent essay *On Toleration,* Michael Walzer argued that American liberalism is traditionally more tolerant of cultural diversity than French republicanism. The French have developed, he contends, a more powerful and coercive concept of assimilation than have the Americans. Although France has received many immigrants, it could never be described as "a nation of immigrants." Newcomers have been expected to become thoroughly French in their public personae, and most of them have. In America, according to Walzer, "children are taught that they are citizens of a plural and tolerant society—where what is tolerated is their own choice of cultural membership and identity."[1] European immigrants have of course been the main beneficiaries of this cultural toleration. At least in recent times, no price has had to be paid for celebrating one's Irishness, Italianness, Jewishness, or Polishness—in fact vote-seeking politicians from other ethnic groups customarily join in the festivities.

But before glorifying American tolerance and condemning the French, we need to recall the American color line, which has denigrated people not so much because of culture but because of the racist belief that nonwhite ancestry endows differing degrees of intelligence, character, and capability. Racism in the American sense has had its adherents in

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France, especially on the far right, but their views have been less influential than the opinions of those who have defined human diversity primarily in terms of cultural differences. Sociological surveys suggest that the French are significantly less prejudiced against black Africans or West Indians than against Muslim North Africans who are as light-skinned as many French, but who are considered a cultural threat.[2]

The French may need multiculturalism more than the Americans, but Americans need what the African National Congress of South Africa calls "non-racialism" more than the French. A confusion between the need to overcome phenotypic racism, which remains a more basic problem for the United States than for France, and the need for cultural toleration, which is not so difficult a challenge for Americans, has at times muddied debates over multiculturalism in both countries.

Walzer provides some grounds for optimism that non-European immigrants will receive a full acknowledgment of their cultural rights. But one cultural issue has come to the fore that has provoked a resurgence of nativist sentiment—the question of language retention and bilingual education. Several state legislatures have recently passed laws recognizing English as an official language. Controversies concerning the linguistic rights of immigrants are not without precedent in American history. The issue of whether immigrants have the right to be instructed in their own language arose in the late nineteenth century in the case of German-language schools in the Midwest. Today the language in question is Spanish, and programs in the public schools that begin instruction in Spanish and then gradually move to English have come under intense attack. Bilingual education, the printing of electoral ballots in various languages, and the conduct of public business in Spanish in some localities has led to a movement to amend state and federal constitutions to mandate the use of English in all government functions.

Language and Rights

Comparatively speaking, however, the United States does not yet face a serious problem of linguistic diversity. The world is filled with countries that are deeply divided among language groups that claim equal rights with others—from South Africa with its eleven official languages to Canada and Belgium with two each. As the Spanish-speaking population of the United States continues to grow, demands for official bilingualism will be made on the state level. The experience of other countries suggests to me that such a policy would not be disastrous, so long as many people can be induced to learn and use more than one language, as is currently the case in such polyglot nations as Belgium, South Africa, Canada, Switzerland, and India. It would enrich the culture of the border states of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico—to say nothing of improving intergroup and international relations—if all students in these states were required to learn Spanish in public schools, just as English-speaking Canadians and Flemish-speaking Belgians must take some French.

Walzer prescribes "state neutrality" as a basis for ethnic toleration, but this may not be adequate, given the current situation of increasing diversity. Political philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Amy Gutmann argued in a recent symposium on multiculturalism that achieving individual rights in an ethnically diverse democratic society requires (in the words of Gutmann) not only "respect for the unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity," but also "respect for those activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world that are particularly valued by, or associated with, members of disadvantaged groups, including women, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans, and a multitude of other groups in the United States." According to Habermas, "A correctly understood theory of rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the integrity of the individual in the life context in which his or her identity is formed."[3]

Critics of multiculturalism might at this point predict the "disuniting of America." What kind of consensus can we hope for if cultural differences are accorded this level of official protection and recognition, even if it is done on the liberal basis of an extension of individual rather than group rights? "Complex societies," Habermas argues in response, "can

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no longer be held together by a substantive consensus on values but only by a consensus on the procedures for the legitimate enactment of laws and the legitimate exercise of power."[4] American national unity is supposedly premised on the commitment to democratic institutions and procedures and not on an officially sanctioned set of cultural values, so we should be in a better position to accept such a conception of what holds us together than nations, such as Habermas's Germany, that have traditionally affirmed an ethnocultural nationalism.

The United States, however, may not be as "complex" as the plural societies to which Habermas's formula would obviously apply. Political scientist Jennifer Hochschild contends that U.S. citizens, with few exceptions, affirm "the American dream" of material success through individual effort. Her study *Facing Up to the American Dream* shows that even the most underprivileged tend to accept this ideal in principle even if they are unable to live up to it in practice.

Most voluntary immigrants, from whatever source, have come to America primarily with the aim of improving their material circumstances. Traditionalist Native Americans and Hawaiians, and some religious communities like the Amish and Hutterites, do not share this ideal of America as a land of economic opportunity for individuals and nuclear families. Their historically sanctioned rights to practice a communalism contrary to American individualist norms must be respected. But most Americans, of whatever ethno-racial background, place a high value on individual opportunity to prosper and attain a decent standard of living. From this perspective, our challenge is to make life chances for material betterment equally available to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. The debate on affirmative action centers on the question of whether historically disadvantaged groups need special consideration to "level the playing field." (I happen to think that they do, but I will not argue the case here.) America therefore shares with many other nations the challenge of how to accommodate increasing ethnic diversity through immigration from non-European sources. But our basic values and democratic principles may permit us to cope with this mixing of populations more effectively than the principal nations of Western Europe.

America's Color Line

What is truly unique about America's diversity, at least compared to other modern industrialized nations in which multiculturalism has become an issue, has been the continuous presence of a substantial and radically disadvantaged minority descended from the *involuntary* immigrants that the slave trade brought from Africa during the colonial period and for a short time thereafter. As a result, most white Americans, past or present, have had some direct experience of racial advantage signifying that their status was higher than that of African Americans. The American liberal tolerance for ethnic diversity praised by Michael Walzer has traditionally stopped at the color line.

Will Kymlicka's distinction between national minorities and immigrant minorities leaves unresolved questions concerning the rights and status of African Americans, who are neither a national nor a voluntary immigrant minority. They were incorporated by force like indigenous peoples but, like free immigrants, they came from elsewhere and lack a territorial base. The perennial debate among African Americans between separatists and integrationists can be seen as an effort to situate the black American experience in relation to Kymlicka's dichotomy. Nationalists have in effect argued that blacks are the equivalent of a national minority that deserves communal autonomy and group representation, while integrationists have in effect accepted the immigrant analogy, if not as a current reality at least as an ideal to be pursued. The caste-like character of black status, especially in the South, had no real parallel in British, French, Canadian, or even German domestic society (despite rising anti-Semitism) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—although of course one can find some equivalency in the colonies of the European nations. The anthropologist John Ogbu suggested in *Minority Education and Caste* that the best analogies for understand-

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ing the African-American situation are not ethnic minorities of the usual sort but rather lower castes like the Burakhumin of Japan and the untouchables of India—groups that have traditionally been relegated to menial roles, socially segregated, and prohibited from intermarrying with the upper caste or castes.

But the caste analogy, while useful as a corrective to simply considering African Americans another minority, is not perfect either. It suggests a permanence of status that is belied by the history of black-white relations in the United States. Blacks in the South of the Jim Crow era may have been very like a caste, but the civil rights movement destroyed the legal basis for such a status. Currently, I would suggest, African Americans are caught between the legacy of caste and the possibility of being included as another ethnic group in a multicultural America. To me, this means that black-specific and not just race-specific policies may be necessary. Affirmative action, which does not usually apply to Asians, may become unnecessary for Latinos, or at least some Latino groups, at some point in the near future and yet remain a justifiable policy for blacks so long as extralegal racism perpetuates aspects of color caste.

It is highly significant, I think, that intermarriage between African Americans and whites, although increasing, is much lower than that between Asian and Euro-Americans or between Latinos and Anglos. Furthermore, recent polls reveal that a majority of whites continue to oppose black-white marriages on principle.[5] Such data might be taken as evidence of the survival of caste consciousness among a significant proportion of the American population. A multiculturalism that treats all people of color as equally disadvantaged will not, in all probability, suffice to bring full justice and equality to African Americans. To repair the damage done by almost four centuries of enslavement, segregation, white-on-black violence, and pervasive caste discrimination, we will have to go beyond the toleration of differences and reach for the higher ground of interracial and intercultural democracy. ●

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1. Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 73-74.

2. "Asked in a survey which category of immigrants poses the greatest difficulty for integration, 50 percent of French respondents identified North Africans, far more than the 19 percent who named Black Africans. . . ." Donald L. Horowitz, "Immigration and Group Relations in France and America," in *Immigrants in Two Democracies: French and American Experience*, eds. Donald L. Horowitz and Gerard Noriel (New York University Press, 1992), p. 19.

3. Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann, ed. (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 8, 113.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 135

5. According to calculations based on population table 62 of *The Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), p. 57, 9.6 percent of marital unions involving blacks were interracial, and 8.6 percent resulted from blacks having married whites. This contrasts with the 27.4 percent of all existing marital unions involving Hispanics that represent outmarriages. The outmarriage rates of Asian Americans, especially Japanese, have been even higher than those of Hispanics. A majority of whites remain opposed to marriage across the color line. In 1994, polls revealed that only 45 percent of whites approved of marriages between blacks and whites and 16 percent thought they should be made illegal. See table 2 of Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible* (Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 524.

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Rejuvenating Free Expression

An Argument for Minors' First Amendment Rights

Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter.
-Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*

Marjorie Heins

In 1996, Congress conditioned federal aid to sex education programs on their adoption of "abstinence only" pedagogy. Instructors must teach that "sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects," and that "abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way" to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Information about condoms or other means of avoiding pregnancy or HIV is forbidden.

Two years later, a federal appeals court rejected a First Amendment academic freedom claim by a high school drama teacher who had coached her advanced acting class in an award-winning performance of a play called *Independence*. The teacher, Margaret Boring, had been transferred to a junior high school and stripped of her theater specialty after a parent complained that the play's themes included divorce, homosexuality, and unwed pregnancy. The court cited Plato's *Republic* in support of its ruling that teachers have no First Amendment rights in connection with school curriculum:

> A young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts.

That an American court should rely upon this pedagogical assertion was remarkable. For Plato was hardly a friend of intellectual freedom—his ideal republic rigidly censored art and literature. The judges' approval of Plato's argument for indoctrination in "virtuous thoughts" dramatized the extent to which courts by 1998 had rejected the idea that education of the young should include exposure to controversy. Like "abstinence-only" sex education, judicial denial of academic freedom for high school teachers and students treats youngsters as fragile creatures in need of protection from controversial or "immoral" ideas, rather than citizens possessed of First Amendment rights.

The same paternalism is evident throughout the political landscape—in enthusiasm for television v-chips, Internet rating and filtering schemes, "explicit lyrics" labels on popular music, and computer "indecency" laws; and in national hand-wringing over children's access to such news items as the explicit details of the Starr report. Children in American political mythology have become tender innocents, incapable of conceiving a corrupting thought unless it is thrust upon them; even high school drama students are fantastically described as simpletons who cannot distinguish the "allegorical" from the "literal." Perhaps the most damaging fallout of this contempt for minors' ability to think, read, and inquire has been the purging of controversial material from public school courses and libraries. From Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List,* no work that addresses the human condition has been exempt from attack. In 1995, a Missouri teacher was fired for allowing her students to use profanity in their creative writing assignments, and although a federal jury awarded her damages, an appeals court reversed the verdict. A teacher in Colorado lost his job the following year for

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showing his advanced history class Bernardo Bertolucci's *1900*; complaints about nudity, sexual content, and violence seemed to obliterate any appreciation by the school board of the film's historical and aesthetic value.

The assumption that minors are harmed by reading, watching movies, or surfing the Internet is, of course, usually framed in terms of "gratuitous violence" or "pornography," not works by Bernardo Bertolucci or Toni Morrison. Many child protectionists would object to extensions of their doctrine that bar mention of contraceptives in sex education classes or ban "controversial" content in literature courses. What they overlook, however, is that terms like pornography and gratuitous violence are infinitely elastic. Is *Schindler's List* gratuitously violent—or not violent enough, given the enormity of the horrors it depicts? Cinemaphiles can debate the point, but the fact is that school boards have banned this highly educational film from curricular use because of its "R" rating for violence and nudity. Likewise, safer sex films that actually deal with the realities of putting on a condom—not to mention the fun one might have in the process—are labeled pornographic, as are the Starr report, the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, daytime talk shows, and other cultural outpourings too numerous to mention. Any system of restrictions on expression—even one as superficially benign in appearance as television or Internet ratings—vests decisions about what is gratuitously violent, offensive, inappropriate, or prurient in classifiers and censors. The difficulty of distinguishing "good" from "bad" messages in art or literature, or "quality" from crude or lowbrow sexual content, explains why the recently launched television rating system, forced by Congress on the television industry in 1996, eschews any effort to make such distinctions, and instead simply contains four subject matter categories—sex, violence, suggestive language, and coarse dialogue. Internet rating-and-blocking systems generally use the same approach.

Protectionist Claims

It is time to take a hard look at what the concept of protecting minors from harmful speech really means, before the censorship juggernaut goes any further. If, as I will suggest, harm to minors is essentially a shorthand for suppressing ideas and subjects that are considered immoral or offensive, then serious First Amendment questions arise. For youngsters, like adults, possess free-expression rights; they are not merely, as the Supreme Court said in 1969, "closed circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate." And one fundamental tenet of the First Amendment is that government cannot aim at the suppression of ideas it considers dangerous; these are matters that citizens decide for themselves. As a federal appeals court explained in striking down an anti-pornography law crafted by activists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, "any other answer leaves the government in control of all the institutions of culture, the great censor and director of which thoughts are good for us."

But—so the argument goes—minors are different. They are not sufficiently developed or socialized to understand and resist the perils of bad speech. This is surely true for little ones, but less so for older children and teenagers. Indeed, psychologists have found little overall difference between adults' and older minors' ability to make coherent decisions based upon their processing of relevant information. Teenagers, moreover, *need* free access to information and ideas, precisely because they are in the process of identity formation. They are also in the process of becoming functioning adults in a democratic society, and they cannot really be expected to do so if they are shielded from all dangerous or disturbing ideas until they are eighteen. Finally, censorship itself can harm youngsters—by denying them respect and a sense of autonomy, by instilling sexual guilt and shame, and even by threatening their physical health, as the information-denying rigidity of the federal abstinence-only program illustrates.

Still, the child protectors argue, the need to protect minors from the harms of sexual speech outweighs free-expression principles. Pornography, they say, may traumatize youngsters, and in any event teaches them bad attitudes about sex. They might even imitate the sexual acts that they see. In the context of media violence, social science has allegedly

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shown that "excessive" exposure "may cause" aggressive behavior in a small but statistically significant fraction of minors. Space here does not permit dissection of these (in fact, quite dubious) studies, but it is worth noting that the theory of imitation, or "social learning," is just one among many psychological explanations for how art and entertainment affect human psyches; and it is arguably an overly simplistic and reductionist one. Aristotle's theory of catharsis—positing that art purges powerful, sometimes destructive, emotions and actually makes us less likely to engage in anti-social conduct—still has its adherents. Bruno Bettelheim's classic study, *The Uses of Enchantment*, observed the cathartic function of horrific fairy tales in children's psychological development. Even Roger Shattuck, who fulminates in his book *Forbidden Knowledge* against sexual violence in literature, recognizes ancient differences between Plato and Aristotle regarding "crime and evil in art," and acknowledges that art has the power to purge as well as intensify emotions. As critic Mark Oppenheimer wrote recently, explaining the popularity of the much-censored Judy Blume, her books dramatizing childhood and adolescent problems are cathartic in their appeal to youngsters who have "outgrown the fantastic" and thirst for stories about real life.

My brief here for recognizing the power of catharsis, even for young people, is not intended to deny the obvious fact that the media do influence attitudes—of adults and children alike. The unanswerable question is precisely how. What effect does any particular idea, image, or story have on any particular age group or person? The answer varies with every individual and depends upon a multitude of factors, from genetic predisposition to family and community environment. Even social-learning theorists acknowledge that the media are only one among many influences on children's attitudes and behavior, and far from the most important. Any attempt at rating, blocking, or prohibiting expression that contains violence, vulgarity, bigotry, or sex will collide with this fundamental unpredictability about the effects of art.

Thoughtful protectionists will acknowledge these problems of overgeneralization and unpredictability, but still maintain that we have to start somewhere. Because we can't transform all parents into paragons of virtue or provide all youngsters with wholesome social environments, the least we can do is censor violence on television, porn on the Internet, heavy metal music, Marilyn Manson T-shirts, *Huckleberry Finn*, lascivious condom ads, or whatever else is thought to contribute to bad attitudes. In the last two decades, the ideological temperature of this argument has risen, especially in the sexual context, as rhetorical emphasis has shifted from "morality" to "feminism"—that is, to theories propagated by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon that pornography degrades women and eroticizes male domination. Beyond the heated rhetoric, however, the justification for "protecting" the young remains the same: otherwise they will pick up bad ideas about sexuality, promiscuity, or violence, before they are mature enough to evaluate and (presumably) reject them.

But because we cannot know what specific works are likely to have these bad effects on any particular individual or group, the conclusion is irresistible that the protectionist argument is less about preventing real-world harm than about symbolism—not only for Dworkin-MacKinnonites, but for child advocates who are concerned about youth violence or teen pregnancy, and for politicians who simply want to appear to be "doing something" to fix social problems about which they are in fact doing nothing. Symbolism is not insignificant, but one must be careful when using it as a basis for censorship. The potential for abuse, and for overbroad restrictions based upon censors' personal reactions to violent, sexual, or "offensive" content, is immense. More fundamentally, of course, the premise of a free society is that citizens, even young ones, should not be deprived of the knowledge, and exposure to controversial ideas, that enables them to decide these matters for themselves.

Court Rulings

I have referred to minors' First Amendment rights, but what is the evidence of their existence? The Supreme Court has in fact spoken eloquently—if not recently—of the impor-

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tance of respecting youngsters' intellectual freedom and curiosity. The precedents begin in 1943 with a famous opinion recognizing the right of Jehovah's Witness children not to be forced to salute the flag. Rejecting the state's argument for indoctrination, Justice Robert Jackson explained that the fact that schools are "educating the young for citizenship is reason for scrupulous protection of constitutional freedoms ... if we are not to strangle the free mind at its source and teach youth to discount important principles of our government as mere platitudes." Twenty-six years later, the same philosophy animated the Court's affirmation in *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* of schoolchildren's right to refuse administrators' orders to remove black armbands that they wore to protest the Vietnam War. Justice Abe Fortas announced that neither teachers nor students "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate"; minors are not simply "closed circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate." In 1982, Justice William Brennan wrote in a school-library censorship case that "[s]tudents must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding"; accordingly, school boards may not remove books from libraries for "narrowly partisan or political" reasons.

But Justice Brennan's inspiring rhetoric in the school library case was carefully cabined. He emphasized that public schools have broad authority to inculcate civic values, and strongly implied that this could include censoring books because of vulgar or sexual content. Later Supreme Court cases seized upon these "inculcation" and "vulgarity" factors to trump student free-speech claims: a 1986 ruling gave administrators the power to punish a student for making a speech laden with sexual *double entendre* at a school assembly, and two years later the Court upheld a principal's censorship of articles on divorce and teen pregnancy in the student newspaper.

Even in the heady days of the flag salute and black armband cases, moreover, the Supreme Court took a constricted view of minors' rights to sexual speech. Just a year before the Court's pronouncement that children are not "closed circuit recipients" of state indoctrination, it upheld a New York law that criminalized the sale to minors of "girlie" magazines that were constitutionally protected—that is, not legally "obscene." Justice William Brennan explained in this case, *Ginsberg v. New York,* that because youngsters have "restricted" First Amendment rights, the girlie magazines could be considered obscene for them, though not for adults. The state's unproven assertion that exposure to erotic material would impair youngsters' "ethical and moral development" was sufficient to uphold the law.

WHEN IT CAME to erotica, then, minors had limited First Amendment rights. But the Supreme Court's first major obscenity case, *Roth v. U.S.* in 1957, had also recognized that sex is "a great and mysterious motive force in human life," a legitimate subject of inquiry and literature. In a 1975 case, the Court tried to reconcile this recognition in *Roth* of the value of sexual speech with the lingering Puritanism of *Ginsberg* and the First Amendment-friendly stand of *Tinker.* The decision struck down a Jacksonville, Florida, ordinance designed to shield youths (and offended adults) from glances of human nudity on drive-in movie screens. Justice Lewis Powell described the problem: "It is well settled that a State or municipality can adopt more stringent controls on communicative materials available to youths than on those available to adults" (citing *Ginsberg*)—but on the other hand, "minors are entitled to a significant measure of First Amendment protection" (citing *Tinker*). "Speech that is neither obscene as to youths nor subject to some other legitimate proscription cannot be suppressed solely to protect the young from ideas or images that a legislative body thinks unsuitable for them." Where this on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand approach would leave youngsters in future cases was not clear.

One discouraging clue came three years later. In the famous "seven dirty words" decision, *Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica,* the Supreme Court seemed to forget about youngsters' First Amendment rights entirely, so benumbed were the five justices in

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the majority by concerns about protecting children from vulgarity. For *Pacifica* involved not sexually explicit information or pornography but comedian George Carlin's *Filthy Words* monologue, a satire on the taboos surrounding "seven dirty words" that one supposedly "couldn't say on the public airwaves." The FCC, which claimed authority to censor broadcast "indecency" (its previous targets had included an interview with the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia and call-in discussions of oral sex on early-1970s "topless radio"), warned New York's Pacifica station that its broadcast of Carlin's monologue at 2 p.m. violated the indecency standard, which it defined as "language that describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium, sexual or excretory activities and organs, at times of the day when there is a reasonable risk that children may be in the audience."

FIVE SUPREME COURT justices agreed. John Paul Stevens wrote an opinion in *Pacifica* emphasizing that broadcasting should be regulated more extensively than other media because it "invades" the home and is "uniquely accessible to children, even those too young to read." He did not explain why young, pre-literate children's exposure to Carlin's unbuttoned language was harmful, though Justice Lewis Powell, in a concurrence, did make the attempt. Powell asserted that children "are not possessed of that full capacity for individual choice which is the presupposition of First Amendment guarantees," and that vulgar speech "may have a deeper and more lasting negative effect on a child than on an adult." What was the nature of this "more lasting negative effect"? Powell did not elaborate, noting only that "the language involved in this case is as potentially degrading and harmful to children as representations of many erotic acts." Justice Brennan, vociferously dissenting from these homilies, pointed out that not all parents necessarily agreed with the majority's shock and outrage at "Mr. Carlin's unabashed attitude towards the seven 'dirty words.' "

As Brennan's dissent suggested, the dispute in *Pacifica* was moral and symbolic. Harm was a question not of psychological trauma or antisocial conduct but of sensibility, of the adult world's stating its disapproval of language that most children undoubtedly knew. Lost in the ideological battle was any attention to differences in age, maturity, upbringing, or education, to older minors' healthy curiosity about social mores, or to their First Amendment right to hear, and enjoy, what George Carlin had to say. *Pacifica*'s assumption that government could censor in order to shield minors from "indecent" speech became a reigning proposition of constitutional law—at least until 1996, when Congress passed the Communications Decency Act, or CDA.

The CDA made it a federal crime to display "patently offensive" online sexual content "in a manner available to" anyone under eighteen. This meant almost all Internet communications (with the exception, ironically, of commercial porn sites that charge for entry). The plaintiffs in *Reno v. ACLU,* the lawsuit challenging the CDA, wanted to communicate potentially offensive or indecent material to teenagers on subjects ranging from contraception and safer sex to human rights abuses, prison rape, feminism, and censorship itself. Their point was to challenge the longstanding assumption that "indecency" harms minors, not just win the *Reno* case on the more obvious theory that by essentially banning all indecent speech online, Congress had unconstitutionally reduced the adult population to reading "only what is fit for children."

The Supreme Court's 1997 decision in *Reno* invalidated the CDA on the simpler ground, but did also note the many non-harmful sexual ideas that could be suppressed under the indecency standard. The prospect, for example, of criminalizing e-mail exchanges on sexual topics between parents and teenagers was a powerful argument for the justices that the CDA was hopelessly overbroad. Although Justice Stevens's opinion for the Court repeated the mantra that at least some patently offensive speech about sex is harmful to minors, he did not identify what communications fit in that category. Instead, he noted that serious discussions of birth control, homosexuality, or indeed the appendix to the *Pacifica* decision (which reprinted the"Filthy Words"

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monologue), could violate the CDA, and wrote of the intolerable vagueness of an indecency ban that turned on such concepts as "patent offensiveness" and "contemporary community standards"—precisely the terms, of course, that Stevens had approved in *Pacifica* nineteen years earlier.

The Supreme Court's suggestion in *Reno* of youngsters' legitimate interest in matters sexual has, however, had little effect on harm-to-minors politics. In 1998, Congress passed the Child Online Protection Act (COPA), substituting a *Ginsberg* "harmful to minors" or "variable obscenity" ban for the broader "indecency" proscription struck down in *Reno*. COPA was invalidated in February 1999 by a Philadelphia judge who nevertheless expressed "personal regret" that his decision "will delay once again the careful protection of our children." Meanwhile, as alternatives or supplements to criminal Internet bans, the White House, anti-pornography groups, and online corporations began to promote the rapidly proliferating array of rating-and-filtering software programs. In 1997, Senator John McCain introduced legislation requiring that any public school or library receiving federal aid for Internet connections must install software that rates and blocks "inappropriate" sites, and two years later, substantially the same bill was introduced again, substituting "harmful to minors" for "inappropriate."

Proposals for rating and blocking have caught on internationally as well. The European Parliament, concerned about material that is "harmful" but not illegal, enthusiastically supports rating and blocking of Internet sites—despite its recognition of widely differing cultural attitudes toward minors and sexuality among its member states. Ironically, international law recognizes the free-expression rights of youth in more specific terms than the U.S. Constitution. In addition to overall protection for free expression in article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, there is a 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that protects youngsters' right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds," and a Charter of Rights of the Child, passed by the European Parliament in 1992, that specifically establishes a right to receive sex education, including "information on birth control methods and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases."

The myriad problems with Internet rating and blocking—misleadingly promoted as "parental empowerment"—are by now common knowledge. Whether they rely on "keyword" identification, "third party" subject-matter classifications (nudity, sex, homosexuality, and so on), or "self-rating," these labeling schemes do not distinguish between art, political discussion, sex information, and commercial "pornography." (The Yale Biology Department and the American Association of University Women were among the sites blocked by one program, used by a Virginia library, that claimed to filter out only "illegal" material.) Ratings, no matter how elaborately calibrated the scale of different categories for sex, nudity, violence, or other "inappropriate" content, reduce the idiosyncratic and highly contextualized process of human communication to a set of insidiously simplistic symbols.

Rejuvenating the First Amendment

Free expression rights obviously have little meaning for four year olds, but open access to information and ideas—and even just entertainment—is a very different matter for older minors. In the frenzy of protectionist enthusiasm, these differences have frequently been overlooked. Thus, judicial rulings such as *Boring* treat high school literature students like toddlers unable to parse fantasy from reality, while fulminations against media sex or violence simplistically assume that blocking some television shows will change the socially, hormonally, and psychologically driven interests and behavior of American teenagers.

Europeans have sometimes paid closer attention to age and maturity levels. The former Norwegian Ombudsman for Children, Målfrid Flekkøy, has pointed out the importance of recognizing free-expression rights, and thereby countering feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness, among adolescents who are kept for ever longer periods in situations of dependence. She proposes a graduated framework of minors' "rights and responsibilities" in areas ranging from sexual consent to film attendance. Justices of Britain's high court, the Law Lords, observed

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in 1985 that as teenagers mature, their parents' (and the state's) right to control their decisions in such areas as sexuality dwindle: "if the law should impose on the process of growing up 'fixed limits' where nature knows only a continuous process, the price would be artificiality and a lack of realism in an area where the law must be sensitive to human development and social change."

AT THE VERY least, then, rejuvenating minors' First Amendment rights should involve appreciation for their gradual maturing. As youngsters approach majority—arguably, by age fifteen—there ought to be a presumption *against* censorship (or "protection"). This would mean that vague government concerns about "ethical and moral development," as in the *Ginsberg* case, would not be a sufficient basis for censorship: as with adults, the state would have to *prove* the need for restrictions. Particularly given the efficacy of education in media literacy and conflict resolution as counters to pernicious ideas gleaned from television, video games, or real life models, there ought to be focused demonstrations of harm caused by specific works to overcome the constitutional presumption of free-speech protection for older teenagers.

Even for younger children, consideration should be given to the notion of preparing them for adulthood through education and exposure to ideas, rather than creation of forbidden thought zones and "closed circuit" indoctrination. There is much to be said for letting youngsters make mistakes and learn from them (as adults do), rather than being spoonfed only books, films, cartoons, or Internet sites that are considered "kid-safe" by a censoring authority. Particularly for economically deprived youngsters, the Internet is a priceless resource; schools and libraries, their only likely venues for Internet access, should not be sanitized in a way that only exacerbates poor children's educational disadvantage when compared to middle-class youth.

Finally, courts, pundits, and policy makers should reconsider the long-accepted but mistaken assumption that sexually explicit or even just vulgar speech merits little constitutional protection, at least in the context of minors. Sexuality is now recognized as an important cultural and political subject; masturbation is no longer thought to produce idiocy and death; and teenagers are sexually active the world over. The same First Amendment that protects nonsexual ideas should protect sexual ones.

Given the heat of the harm-to-minors issue, full constitutional protection, even for teenagers, may not be a readily attainable goal. What I am suggesting, though, is that the much-maligned First Amendment, and its underlying principle of intellectual freedom, be part of the debate. Protectionists rarely consider the countervailing harms of censorship—feelings of powerlessness; training in authoritarianism; shame or confusion resulting from taboos on erotica; indignation at the firing of a good teacher, banning of a good book, or aborting of library research on a sensitive topic by mindless filters. Then, too, there are the more tangible dangers of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies where contraceptive and safer-sex information is forbidden. One of the sad ironies of the current epidemic of school censorship is that, while youngsters are inundated with libidinous but relatively thoughtless mass media entertainment, school boards across America are depriving them of serious, thoughtful literature and discussion about sexuality and other controversial subjects.

Justice Stevens said in *Reno*, "[t]he interest in encouraging freedom of expression in a democratic society outweighs any theoretical but unproven benefit of censorship." This should apply to youngsters, too. ●

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Sources for this article are available from the author, c/o *Dissent*.

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On Evils Abroad and America's New World Order

James B. Rule

As I WRITE, the United States has all but entered into full-scale war in Yugoslavia. Almost forgotten in the current preoccupation with the Balkans is the endemic, smoldering combat being waged by America and its allies with Iraq. Ordinary Americans should be forgiven for their bewilderment as to how their country came to be engaged in these conflicts. We are accustomed to being reminded of U.S. "commitments" in the most diverse and distant corners of the world—from Iraq to Haiti to Korea to Panama. But it's hard to make systematic sense of when and why particular ones of these "commitments" will be cashed out in the violent application of American arms.

For the left, these "commitments," and their unpredictable transformations into warfare, pose a special problem. On the one hand, most of us find it natural to embrace the high principles invoked by policy makers to justify U.S.-led military interventions—the protection of Albanian Yugoslavs from the tender mercies of Serbian ethnic supremacy, for example; or the defense of a small country like Kuwait from military aggression; or the prevention of humanitarian disaster in Somalia or Haiti. There are grave evils abroad in the world, and the desire to see them redressed is no more than decent.

On the other hand, the actual role of such evils in triggering U.S. military action deserves close scrutiny. Only a political infant could imagine that the public justification of operations like the current Serbian campaign or the Gulf War of 1991 fully depict the interests that move this country's elites to military action. In fact, evils of the sort invoked to justify these operations are anything but scarce. Most of them elicit little more than concerned tut-tutting from the Pentagon and the State Department. What it actually takes to start this country banging heads in one corner of the world or another is a great deal more complex, and much less high-minded.

At the very least, we on the left must cast a skeptical eye on the fateful political ballet by which American opinion makers segue from expression of lofty principle to the gore and destruction of war. And raising this issue in turn confronts us with the need to assess the extraordinary role played by America in the world system of military power. Do we on the left really want to support an American military order so far-reaching as to arbitrate power relations throughout the world? Here a consensus position has been difficult for the left.

The elusiveness of such consensus was brought home to *Dissent* during the run-up to the Persian Gulf War in 1990. Editors and friends of the magazine were divided over that war, politically estranged from one another and from other colleagues on the left. That period presented the magazine with what its late editor Irving Howe called "an invitation to self-destruct." Had that war brought losses to America roughly comparable to those experienced by the other side, that opportunity might well have turned into something more than an abstract possibility.

Let us, then, attempt to draw something useful from that dissent within *Dissent*. Similar perplexities on the left, after all, seem all but inevitable over the conflict in the Balkans, and the same issues will surely continue to arise elsewhere. Before we confront the next application of U.S. military might in a part of the world most Americans can scarcely identify, we ought to have our speech prepared.

The weight of what's at stake can hardly be in doubt. At the end of the twentieth cen-

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tury, no feature of world affairs is more basic, more axiomatic to all calculations of statecraft, than the unchallenged supremacy of America's coercive might. From Taiwan to Latvia, from Chile to Saudi Arabia, the attitudes of this country are a factor in nearly every international move and arrangement. Millions of lives around the world stand to be lost or saved, countless individual aspirations and collective designs stand to be supported or undone, by American military might. It ought to give pause that *Dissent*, and commentators on the left more generally, have given so little attention to the programmatic question of where we stand—not just on specific conflicts, but on the unipolar system of U.S. dominance that makes U.S. military action abroad all but inevitable. What kind of global role should we expect of America, and how can we reconcile such expectations with the rest of our political vision?

On these questions, the debates that led up to the Gulf War in 1991 offer some striking cases in point. For me, two memories of those events remain incandescent—and quite chilling.

THE FIRST is the speed and ease with which American public opinion was sold on that vast military operation—over a *causus belli* that most Americans would surely have regarded with indifference if not incomprehension before this country's elite took it up. Certainly Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was inexcusable. But military aggression is hardly a rarity, much as we deplore it. It is hard to imagine that most Americans would have ascribed any special import to Iraq's invasion of its irritating neighbor, without the artful public dramaturgy orchestrated by the Bush administration.

Indeed, at the time, even the Saudis and other "allies" supposedly being protected by the operation required a hard sell by Bush and company before allowing themselves to be defended. But American public opinion, far from displaying the isolationism fearfully ascribed to it by some commentators, was quickly moved to define Iraq's aggression as a test of U.S. "resolve"—and hence to grant approval to the far-flung military operations that ensued.

My second chilling recollection of those events has to do with the response of a number of *Dissent* colleagues. From the very beginning, they embraced what I call the Imperial Vision of the situation. Reading from a text that might have originated at the Pentagon, they took it as axiomatic that international misbehavior—defined in U.S. terms, of course—anywhere in the world required redress by U.S. arms. Since the United States was the only available agency for punishing Saddam's invasion, it fell to this country to "kick his ass out of Kuwait," in the winning phrase of George Bush. Obviously, similar chains of reasoning have been evoked to justify U.S. military action against Serbia.

It is striking that this mindset can come so naturally to commentators on the left. In 1990, the first symptoms were often rhetorical—beginning with reflexive reliance on the pronouns "we" and "us." Why should commentators identified with the left so reflexively have found themselves sharing the first person plural with the U.S. military and foreign-policy establishment? At the time, many seemed to find the answer to this question self-evident. The Persian Gulf situation, as they saw it, was a replay of Europe in the 1930s. Saddam Hussein was a Hitleresque personality, his annexation of Kuwait the equivalent of the Austrian *Anschluss*. Failure to reverse the invasion would be as inexcusable as acquiescence to the Nazi war machine.

The same sorts of demonization have been applied to Slobodan Milosevic and his campaigns in Kosovo. His evident vision of an "Albanian-free" state, the resulting hordes of exhausted and terrified refugees—these things have made comparison to the Nazi regime an easy recourse for proponents of military action against Serbia. In noting this fact, I by no means minimize the sheer evil of Serbia's project of ethnic supremacy, any more than I condone Saddam Hussein's military aggression in 1990. I simply stress the political significance of the public vilification of these figures. Even authentically demonic characters require official demonization before America's elites can unleash the full force of this country's military power against them. When Americans hear their leaders comparing any

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regime to those of Hitler and Stalin, we can be sure that the ultimate extremities of this country's coercive might are about to be brought down on it.

The problem is that the world is full of situations and personalities that lend themselves to demonization—and that the processes by which demons are selected for this purpose are anything but transparent. Serbia's ethnic repression, for example, has been catapulted into public attention as grounds for war against Belgrade. But very similar and equally horrific campaigns against the Kurds in Turkey or the Christians in the Sudan or the Tutsis in Rwanda triggered no such response. Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990 set the stage for the Gulf War, whereas the same country's invasion of Iran in 1980 was quietly welcomed by the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Nor did anyone seriously imagine that this country would take up arms to oppose the Indonesian annexation of East Timor in 1976, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, or the Moroccan invasion of Mauritania in 1971.

The explanation for this vast variation in U.S. response to demonic events is that most of these occasions threatened no major U.S. geopolitical interest. They were either carried out by U.S. allies or the victims simply did not matter to U.S. policy makers. Saddam Hussein's problem in 1990 was not that he was an aggressor, but that he ran afoul of America's New World Order, threatening client states who had been promised U.S. protection. A former ally of the United States against Iran, Iraq had been forgiven by this country as recently as 1987 for its sly attack on U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf. Slobodan Milosevic, too, had been tolerable to U.S. policy makers—until his repression in Kosovo threatened to roil relations among such crucial U.S. allies as Greece and Macedonia.

The American public is readily moved by its leaders' exhortations to "stand firm against oppression," to "demonstrate our resolve," or to "give no comfort to aggressors." But abroad, other players in the great game of international power understand perfectly the distinction between the political justifications for military action and what constitutes the authentic vital interests of U.S. policy. And in the last ten years, those vital interests have grown to entail the role of maker and breaker of geopolitical relations all over the world.

The question is—or ought to be, for the left—do we want to support the system of power necessary to continue indefinitely enforcing American rules of the international game? Should we support the social and political order necessary to sustain the Pax Americana sought by U.S. elites? Inured, after decades, to their country's global overweening, most Americans seem to have lost the ability to ask this question. Let us hope that we on the left do not suffer this same loss.

WE ALL understand how we got here. From the late 1940s, the United States maintained a military establishment proportionally larger than that of the "free world" allies it was supposedly prepared to defend—with more than double the per capita spending level of any other country, including the USSR, as recently as 1991. The rationale for this vast enterprise, of course, was the menace of the Soviet bloc. Any relaxation in the rates of military expenditure, any slackening of U.S. willingness to confront the communist enemy, it was said, would invite the advance of totalitarianism, from Finland to Latin America to South Korea.

We now know that, for decades, these threats were outrageously bulked by interested parties on both sides. According to recent reports, missiles displayed in May Day parades on Red Square in the 1960s were fakes—Potemkin ICBMs, one might say. The elementary character of this ruse did not deter U.S. policy makers from gleefully seizing on the display to sell the country multibillion dollar antimissile systems. Perhaps even more seriously, as the economic performance of the Soviet Union and its empire relentlessly declined during the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. intelligence continued to portray the Soviet bloc as a realistic competitor to the West. The entrenched interests driving these scare tactics are not difficult to discern in retrospect. But the lack of a full public accounting of this outrageous manipulation of U.S. opinion ought to be a national scandal.

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With the implosion of the Soviet Union, the U.S. military establishment faced what one might have expected to be a grave crisis—the need for a credible enemy. In a political order less addicted to military activities as a source of economic redistribution, such a situation would surely have led to a drastic drop in expenditures. But the tapering off of military spending has not been remotely commensurate with changes in the global balance of power. In 1996, the United States still spent more for military purposes than the NATO countries and its chief Asian allies (Japan, South Korea, and Australia) combined. Eight years after the collapse of the Evil Empire, in the words of former Assistant Secretary of Defense Lawrence Korb, " 'defense' spending is now only 12 percent below the average level from 1976 to 1990." Though U.S. military expenditures are at a post–World War II low as a percentage of total economic activity, they continue to be high in comparison to other rich countries; in fact, America still accounts for roughly one-third of world military expenditures. Indeed, the U.S. spends more on its military than the next six biggest spenders combined.

No doubt, much good could come from a world system policed by U.S. military power. Indeed, much good *has* come from its precursor, the U.S. military umbrella that extended over "the free world" in the postwar years. That geopolitical equation permitted the peaceful reconstitution of Germany and Japan as nonmilitarized, democratic states after their World War II defeats. More recently, worldwide U.S. military power has helped shield an increasingly pluralistic Taiwan from intimidation by the authoritarian regime on the Chinese mainland. It has discouraged—with mixed success, to be sure—the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It has belatedly assisted in the transition of South Africa toward multiracial democracy. This list could be much extended; the entries are anything but trivial.

To many on the left, it appears, these bright examples suffice to justify acquiescence, if not active support, for the indefinite militarization of America. In the post-Soviet era, they might argue, U.S. power promises to sustain pluralism and democracy all around the world. Curtailing that power would undercut the ability of the United States to support beleaguered peoples and constructive political tendencies from Taiwan to Macedonia. Much of the enthusiasm on the left for America's role in the Balkans and the Persian Gulf seems to have stemmed from just such a rationale.

The best that can be said for this thinking is that it reflects a touching faith in the ultimate interests animating America's elites. Again, the masters of U.S. foreign policy can be counted on to play the defense-of-freedom theme whenever it might secure support for this country's military exploits. But experience shows that, when America does apply its coercive might, there is no assurance that the targets will be ones favored by the left. If the United States (note that I do not write "we") comes down on the side of pluralism in Bosnia or Taiwan today, it may as likely lend support to Mexico's ruling party or to the authoritarian regime in Saudi Arabia or to its Turkish ally's repression of the Kurds tomorrow. If U.S. foreign policy teaches us anything, it is the trickiness of predicting freedom's next Enemy of the Month. At any historical moment, it would seem, some on the left will find their own reasons for sleeping in the same bed with the Pentagon. But they will always be dreaming different dreams.

THUS WE on the left have no more pressing need than to articulate a coherent, critical vision of America's New World Order—a vision distinctive to the left, and consistent with left values in other domains. It will not do to fall back on sententious formulations like Anthony Lewis's invocations of America's "special power and responsibility in the world." Such powers and responsibilities are not part of some fixed and forgone order of things; they have not been thrust upon Americans by the Deity or some form of Manifest Destiny. They should hardly be exempt from critical examination.

At issue here is not the cost of any specific weapon system or military operation. It's the comprehensive cost of maintaining the far-flung, self-perpetuating military presence necessary to make or break regimes all around the world. It is now America's official military doc-

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trine that this country must be prepared to fight two "major theatre wars" and one "smaller scale contingency" at a time—an ambition to which, I dare say, no other nation can begin to aspire. Someone has to ask: what interest do ordinary Americans have in such a vast and overblown project?

Any such examination needs to begin with a hard look at *opportunity costs*—at what America gives up in order to preside over its New World Order. What kind of New Domestic Order could America afford if it renounced its role of world hegemon?

Consider the provision of basic medical care to its citizenry—a dimension on which this country falls far short of the achievements of the other Western democracies that supposedly shelter under U.S. military power. The annual cost of extending medical insurance to the 43 million Americans now lacking it would come to about eighty billion dollars per year, roughly a third of this country's annual military budget. The approximately two billion dollars spent on America's Persian Gulf operations last year would have afforded a quarter of the nation's eligible children the benefits of participating in Head Start programs.

Perhaps the most exorbitant price America pays for its geopolitical role is not fully expressed in dollars and cents. I am thinking of vital qualities of a democratic order that are stymied by the militarization of American society. Among these are the vast dark regions of public expenditure and policy making that cannot be openly discussed or debated because they are part of the national security domain—"classified information," off-limits to public scrutiny. Then there is the corrosive effect of the constant flow of military dollars back into the political process. Finally, there are the costs of that wide swath of political attention—both from elites and ordinary citizens—absorbed by the never-ending preoccupation with managing America's New World Order. Before current obsessions with the Balkans, of course, Iraq was a chronic preoccupation; and before (and during) the Iraq period were worries over the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, Somalia or Haiti. Together, these tendencies leave U.S. political culture dominated by military mind-sets to an extent well beyond what prevails in other Western democracies.

To these charges, I can hear a well-rehearsed response. The social goals of the left are eminently legitimate, some will say. But they cannot safely be pursued unless this country remains strong, able to respond to emergencies that might threaten it without warning. The world is a dangerous place—so let us have guns before butter, even if social justice is to some degree short-circuited in the process.

Against such views, the left needs to project new meanings for such emotive terms as "strong" and "emergency." Today, Saddam Hussein can provoke what is publicly defined as a billion-dollar "emergency" for the United States simply by refusing to act like a vanquished party. By contrast, the fact that tens of millions of Americans have no medical coverage is *not* an emergency by current standards. Nor is the fact that thousands of U.S. school buildings are in grave need of repair; or that thousands of dangerous toxic sites remain unattended to; or that it is all but impossible for anyone to enter national politics without plunking down a small fortune as the price of admission.

These, we must insist, are the *real* emergencies—emergencies of a far more pressing kind than any danger posed by the world's regional dictators. For America to be *truly* strong, its people must be well—not necessarily affluent, but healthy, gainfully occupied, meaningfully educated—and its public life vibrant. Our national interest in punishing a Slobodan Milosevic or a Saddam Hussein can rarely rise to this importance.

WHAT CHANGES, then, should the left be demanding in these matters? For starters, let us insist that America reduce its military expenditures—including the "black budget" devoted to intelligence and covert operations—by half. That would begin to bring this country's spending for these purposes into line with those of the prosperous allies supposedly protected by America's New World Order. It's bizarre, but any such notion will surely strike many as dangerously radical. Fair enough; we on the left should not shrink from radical conclusions, especially when they

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derive from the most reasonable of premises.

But budgets are not the crux of the issue. Concomitant with demands for military budget reductions, we also need to insist on scaling back the sweeping ambitions of America's world hegemony. It's not just U.S. public expenditure that needs changing—it's Americans' view of their role in the world community.

Such proposals will surely trigger charges of "abdication" of America's "international responsibilities," of appeasement-in-the-making—quite likely of "isolationism." But in fact, a broad scaling back of America's world military ambitions would still allow for both defense of authentic national interest and even meaningful U.S. engagement abroad. What I am suggesting is simply that the United States redefine itself for international purposes as a "normal country." By this I mean a country capable of joining in significant, if selective, applications of force beyond its borders—yet no longer casting itself as the indispensable maker and breaker of interstate arrangements all around the world.

One positive repercussion of such a development might well be to shift pursuit of U.S. geopolitical interests toward *collective*, rather than unilateral action. A few slender straws in the wind suggest that such principles may be gaining ground. As Robert Keohane points out in his excellent *After Hegemony*, recent decades have seen the growth of new transnational norms—treaties and other arrangements on such matters as arms control, environmental affairs, and world trade. While hardly renouncing self-interest in these crucial domains, states have been willing to *redefine* their interests to accept short-term sacrifices in pursuit of shared long-term goals.

There are signs that processes of this kind are taking hold. Painfully, and with many a backward lurch, an international consensus on human rights is emerging, along with tools for enforcing such understandings. We see such signs in the prosecution of those accused of crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia—and more lately in the willingness of the European Community countries to consider the extradition of Augusto Pinochet for the misdeeds of his military regime. The growth of these new patterns makes it plain that sovereign states are capable of putting aside short-term self-interest in support of principles that have wide international support.

We remain, of course, political light-years from a federalist world under a single rule of law. But that is no reason to miss opportunities for movement in that direction. There is no country, needless to say, whose participation in such movement is more crucial—or more problematic—than the United States. The U.S. left should be in the forefront of demands for such participation.

To some, all this will seem like vintage left-wing naivete. "You just don't get it," these avuncular voices will gently advise; "the great thing about being the world's hegemonic power is that other countries have to do what *you* want them to do. When other interests offend you, you can punish them at your convenience; if matters come to war, you get to do the fighting on their territory, rather than yours." Surely, it will be said, these hard-won prerogatives should not be discarded.

But if we shift the focus from the Imperial Vision to the interests of ordinary Americans, matters are not so clear. True, America's coercive might provides certain options not available to "normal" countries. A prime example is the ability to respond to a terrorist bombing of an embassy by dispatching cruise missiles against the suspected perpetrators—located in countries that may (or in the most recent case, may not) have been implicated in the bombings. But this country would face less hostile action abroad if it were less involved in micro-management of affairs in distant parts of the world. Ordinary Americans might then be less certain where their next oil shipments were coming from. But they would also face fewer exhortations from their leaders on the need to "show determination" and "stand firm" in one world conflict after another.

"SO," THE READER will ask, "you want something considerably less for America than its present overweening role of master of the New World Order—but something considerably more than old-fashioned isolationism. What does this mean,

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practically?" Any thorough answer to this utterly legitimate question is beyond my powers here. At best, I can suggest a few broad possibilities and limitations.

- *Strictly on its own*, without help from allies, America ought to be able to defend its territory from foreign invasion or imminent threat. It should be capable of ensuring normal trade relations with willing partners. But it should not maintain capabilities or expectations of making and breaking governments around the world to suit its needs.

- *In conjunction with its allies*, America ought to be able to influence—selectively—geopolitical trends around the world. Among the situations with strong claims on such collective international action are the following: Threats of imminent use of weapons of mass destruction, genocide or other large-scale losses of life, flagrant violations of elementary norms of international conflict (including invasions), imminent threat of environmental disaster (for example, nuclear contamination), or grave dangers to democratic and pluralistic institutions.

But it should be acknowledged in advance that evils abroad will always be in oversupply, that many situations that deserve outside intervention must go without. Resources to right geopolitical wrongs will always be scarce. And there will be questions of *feasibility*—of the likelihood that any conceivable intervention will result in enduring improvements. Often, the response to demands to redress evils abroad will have to be negative. It is simply not realistic to imagine that all such evils, or even the most evil of evils, are subject to correction.

NOT TO BE considered hopelessly naive, let me stress that I fully understand how far these notions are even from receiving serious discussion by policy makers in this country. My immediate aim in putting forward these views is to reach my colleagues on the left. I write in the hope that we can hammer out positions on these matters that reflect our core values—rather than simply reacting to initiatives for foreign intervention from this country's elites.

Such initiatives arrive predictably—typically packaged with appeals for "demonstrating American resolve," "defending freedom," or "giving no comfort to aggressors" or the like. In responding to such blandishments, the left must be quick to pose questions such as the following:

- *Do the elite proponents of military action really intend to pursue consistently the values that they are invoking*, wherever in the world they are engaged? If Americans are being rallied to defend the innocent citizens of Kuwait, for example, or to attack the drug-dealing regime of Panama, can we expect the same appeals for action on behalf of other victims of military aggression or other drug-implicated elites? If not, then the appeals for military action surely deserve skepticism.

- *Does the proposed action promise to stengthen patterns of international behavior that one would like to see followed in other situations?* U.S. missile raids on alleged terrorists in Sudan or Afghanistan may (or may not) dissuade the guilty parties. But do we want to live in a world where attacks on sovereign states are the standard response to terrorist actions?

- *Does the proposed action promise to strengthen democracy, pluralism, and egalitarianism?* By this reckoning, defense of Taiwan or South Korea surely has stronger claims on U.S. attention than that of Kuwait.

- *Does the proposed action appear feasible in its own terms?* All sorts of military attacks or covert operations may be righteous (or cleverly expedient) in intent, but simply unworkable. One can arrest dictators or destroy their fighting capacities. But such successes are not tantamount to creating democratic institutions in their place. If things go wrong, is there an exit strategy? Considering these questions seriously should by itself have stopped the Somalia operation in its tracks; perhaps the same could be said for the Gulf War.

- *What will be the cost*—in lives and well-being; in terms of dollars and cents, and in terms of the patterns of interstate conduct that each new action helps to constitute?

THESE SIMPLE reflections leave unanswered all sorts of pressing questions. Should a democratic society weigh risks

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of life and limb to its professional military forces differently, for example, from risk to conscripted members of the military? How should we on the left think about allocating different levels of national interest to different regions of the world? How should we weigh the value of traditional alliances or connections, like those with Britain or Japan?

It does not come naturally to the left to engage issues like those discussed here—perhaps because we know that we are a long way from making foreign policy in our own right. But we on the left have no more compelling task than calling attention to authentic alternatives to never-ending U.S. militarism. And if there were ever a time to broach these issues, it is now. The very unchallenged position of the United States gives a hollow ring to standard arguments that questioning this country's military posture might somehow give comfort to the enemy. For one historical moment, America has the chance to reconsider, not just the scope of its global ambitions, but also the *kind* of international order we want our children to live under. The left must not miss its opportunity to open this discussion. ●

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The Third Way and The Future of Social Democracy

David Kusnet and Ruy Teixeira

LEFT-OF-CENTER parties now hold or share power in most North American and West European countries, calling a halt to a conservative era that lasted from the end of the 1970s through the beginning of the 1990s. Much of their success can be traced to the economic insecurities and social dislocations resulting from the transition to economies based on high technology and global trade. And some of their appeal can be explained by public weariness with conservative parties that had held office for a decade or more and were showing signs of arrogance and exhaustion.

But progressives have also benefited from a new political approach that presents itself as a response to the new realities of the Information Age and a dramatic departure from the politics and policies of their own parties. Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Gerhard Schröder, their supporters in their own countries, and their admirers abroad have all called this new kind of politics the third way—a title that emphasizes its differences from laissez-faire conservatism and welfare-state liberalism as well. And this new kind of politics has seemed so successful that various schools of thought are eager to claim credit for its origins and ownership of its future.

Thus, a leading American advocate of this approach, Al From of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), has declared that the third way is "the global generic brand name for the progressive politics of the Information Age." Implicitly, From is arguing that the DLC's style of third way politics—one that targets affluent voters, recommends the partial privatization of social insurance programs, and is wary of what it calls class warfare—should hold the American franchise for "the progressive politics of the Information Age."

But there's a different and better sort of third way. This kind of politics is concerned with economic insecurity and inequality and focused on what progressives have always done best: setting rules, making investments, and building institutions to help working people make their way in changing times. And it is in the spirit of the best traditions of progressive parties throughout the West, in keeping with the appeals that actually elected Clinton, Blair, and Schröder, and an appropriate response to the needs of working families in the Information Age.

A Closer Look at the Third Way

After all, the real question about the third way is not whether it's a good idea, as Tony Blair says, to "take the essential values of the center and center-left and apply them to a world of fundamental social and economic change, and to do so free from outdated ideology," but rather what its *content* is beyond that. For example, if its content is simply the message that the current center-left is neither A (old bureaucratic welfare-state social democracy) nor B (heartless capitalism and the night-watchman state), then perhaps we are already there. As mentioned above, voters have bought enough of this product for center-left governments to rule in the United States, Britain, Germany, France, and most of the rest of Western Europe.

On the other hand, if the third way means a message *and* program capable of shaping a new era of broadly shared prosperity and, in doing so, laying the basis for a new period of progressive dominance, we are certainly *not* there. If the third way is to be more than a clever short-term marketing slogan, we are just at the beginning of defining it.

A good way to start defining it is to take a

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quick look at how the politics of left and labor parties have evolved since the end of World War II. We identify three stages in that evolution.

Postwar Social Democracy

The first stage of postwar social democracy lasted until roughly 1973. Coinciding with the "Golden Age" of capitalism, left and labor parties set the agenda, both in and out of power, for the institution and massive expansion of the Keynesian welfare state. Because living standards rose sharply, full employment was the norm, and the expanding welfare state provided many benefits that the working and middle classes viewed as unambiguously good, left-labor parties and their general programmatic approach had a lot of satisfied customers.

This "Golden Age" gave way to the problematic era we still live in: slower productivity and overall economic growth, higher unemployment, particularly in Europe, and slower wage growth and rising inequality (particularly in the United States and Britain). Not coincidentally, it was right after this point that the parties and programs of the left generally began to suffer difficulties as conservatives, further fueled by political reaction to the higher inflation levels of the 1970s, blamed the left for the faltering of the Keynesian welfare state model. They rode this critique to their extraordinary political and ideological ascendancy in the 1980s.

The shock this produced on the left can still be felt today. It reverberates in the pronouncements of New Democrats in the United States, New Labour in the United Kingdom, and new Social Democrats in Germany. The basic idea is: never again. Never again will the left be portrayed as old and identified with an out-of-date political-economic model. Instead, the image of the left will be brought up-to-date and dissociated from the outmoded model. This will enable the left to reposition itself with the electorate and take back the ground lost since 1973.

But what, then, will be the positive political-economic model of the left? It is here that a lack of clarity prevails and leads us to think that this current (second) stage of postwar social democracy is most usefully thought of as *transitional,* a stage that the left must pass through, but that does not yet constitute a stable political arrangement at the current time.

An improved image, although very desirable in the short run, is no substitute for the material accomplishments of a successful political-economic model, one that yields a period of sustained and broadly shared prosperity. Such achievements provide the cement that keeps voters and left parties together over time. Conversely, a party that cannot take credit for these sorts of accomplishments will find voters' loyalties to be tenuous.

It is the development and institutionalization of a political-economic program that would constitute a third stage of postwar social democracy. In some European countries, this stage may be aborning. In others, like the United States, it seems much farther away. And, in light of emerging problems with the global economy, the fate of this third stage in all advanced countries may be closely tied together, since the economic problems of one country are difficult to solve without addressing the economic problems of all.

THE REAL debate about the third way should be about whether it helps the left reach this third stage. If the third way remains primarily a marketing device, its potential is limited. And, if this is true, left hegemony will probably be of short duration, because unsolved economic problems will eventually catch up with these governments. In this sense, the third way leads nowhere except out of office with relatively little accomplished in the interim.

But if the third way can evolve toward substantive engagement and transformation of today's advanced economies, then its potential is immense. This entails, however, jettisoning the current conservative economic consensus, which is based on fiscal austerity, increased labor market flexibility, and unfettered globalization. So far, left governments have found this difficult to do, with the United States being perhaps the most extreme example. Yet all left governments in advanced countries face the same challenge and are hav-

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ing some of the same difficulties.

The basic reason is this: breaking the conservative economic consensus creates problems for the third way as a marketing plan. Aggressive, activist government and expansionary policies create a convenient target for conservatives, who are further aided by the reaction of financial markets to such policies. Swing working- and middle-class voters, whose loyalty to left governments is not yet cemented, may thereby be moved back into the conservative camp, ending the process before it has even begun.

However, without the success of expansionary policies, a third stage will never be established. So: no risk to the marketing plan, no reward in the long-term. A third way that could successfully bear these risks and arrive at the other end at this third stage would be truly worthy of the name.

Americanizing the Third Way

Could such a progressive third way be articulated in the American political context? Absolutely. In fact, the third way is rooted in progressive traditions, particularly the interaction between the Democrats in the United States and left-of-center parties in the United Kingdom and Western Europe.

Further, there are distinctive elements in the outlook and rhetoric of third way leaders that owe a lot to American politics:

(1) They are less statist and more critical of government than the traditional left. Here, their emphasis on empowering individuals rather than building bureaucracies has honorable origins—from the emphasis on decentralization by the early New Left to Robert Kennedy's work with community organizing efforts toward the end of his life. Indeed, the reform of public-sector institutions—the schools, the political process, and government itself—is a major element of their approach.

(2) There is more recognition of the importance of social problems—crime, family breakdown, and social divisions of all kinds—as issues in themselves and not merely as reflections of economic trends.

(3) There is an emphasis on the role of the state in empowering individuals to improve their own lives—especially through education and training.

(4) There is a link between the moral imperatives of investing in people's skills and easing economic inequalities and the practical imperatives of improving economic competitiveness and strengthening social cohesion.

None of this is new. For some time, progressives in the advanced societies have understood that they cannot win elections only by relying upon their traditional constituencies: industrial workers, progressive intellectuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and the poor. For most of the past half century, the left-of-center parties have strived to modernize and moderate themselves, and, in Europe, they have abandoned their earlier commitment to public ownership and exclusive reliance upon organized labor.

DURING THE early 1960s, after John F. Kennedy became the first left-of-center leader of the major industrial democracies to break the conservative electoral monopoly of the 1950s, progressive leaders in other countries emulated his style of politics. Willy Brandt was portrayed as "the German Kennedy." Echoing Kennedy's call for a New Frontier, Harold Wilson promised to bring Britain into "the white heat of the technological revolution." And, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. writes in *A Thousand Days*: "The American President was becoming a hope, if not a hero, for the Labor Party in England, the Social Democrats in West Germany, and for the followers of Mendes-France and Gaston Deferre in France." As with Clinton and Blair, Kennedy's youthful manner made moderation seem hip and contemporary. And, then, as now, left-of-center leaders benefited from contrasting themselves to "yesterday's men"—Dwight D. Eisenhower, Harold Macmillan, Konrad Adenauer, John Diefenbaker.

More than the Kennedy style makes the third way distinctively American—perhaps because Information Age societies are becoming more economically dynamic and socially fluid in character. It reflects upon an ambivalence about the role of government that is characteristically American—the fa-

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mous observation that the political culture of the United States is "ideologically conservative," opposing government in theory, but "operationally liberal," supporting public services in practice. And it builds upon the fact that, from the Homestead Act to the GI Bill, the most popular programs are those that empower people to improve their own lives and require reciprocal effort by the individual citizen.

Differences

In short, U.S. progressives and those in Western Europe have much in common in terms of articulating a third way. However, there are important differences between the United States and other advanced countries that suggest the need for a distinctive approach in the United States. Start with the fact that, in most advanced Western nations, progressive parties built mature welfare states—with comprehensive labor policies, universal social insurance, and high union densities.

Meanwhile, the United States never developed a social democratic party or a mature social democracy. Social insurance programs are a patchwork. Union density is among the lowest in the West. Entire regions maintain low standards for wages and social protection, while denying workers the right to organize unions.

That is why "breaking with the traditions of the past" means something different for progressives in the United States and their counterparts elsewhere. In Western Europe and the United Kingdom, the third way may represent a recognition of the challenges the global economy presents to a mature welfare state, as well as a break with the veto power of organized labor. In the United States, it means something else, and those who call for "a break with the New Deal" find themselves drawn to a politics that wrongly minimizes the problems of economic insecurity and the potential of collective action by working people.

After all, in the United States, "New Deal" liberalism is a shorthand for the most popular aspects of progressivism—universal programs that honor and reward work. Although New Deal liberalism did need to be modernized, it was the liberalism that *replaced* New Deal liberalism that helped drive a wedge between American liberalism and working Americans.

Curiously, Lyndon Johnson and his liberal critics shared a flawed approach. To be sure, the Great Society created programs that benefited the great majority of Americans, from Medicare to student loans, as well as addressing the moral imperatives of civil rights and voting rights. But, in the public mind, it became identified with a grandiose rhetoric about the capacities of government and an exclusive emphasis upon the poorest of the poor. And it seemed to take for granted that most working people were and would remain economically secure.

Meanwhile, as it opposed the Vietnam War abroad and the gap between Great Society rhetoric and reality at home, what came to be called "McGovern liberalism" further emphasized the concerns of social and economic outsiders at the seeming expense of "mainstream" Americans. By the late seventies and early eighties, these tendencies had settled down together as "interest group liberalism"—economically moderate, socially liberal, and addressing progressive constituencies with special appeals that isolated them from most voters.

Putting It All Together

The 1992 Clinton campaign, which predates the current third way discussion, was a model for how all these strands can be put together. It distinguished itself not from the socially inclusive and economically populist politics of the New Deal but from the newer and narrower incarnations of American liberalism. Clinton combined the social values espoused by the DLC with the economic populism advanced by the labor movement and other progressive constituencies. More than any recent political leader, candidate Clinton rooted his appeal in the realities of people's daily lives. Announcing his candidacy, he asserted: "Middle-class people are spending more hours on the job, spending less time with their children, bringing home a smaller paycheck to pay more for health care and housing and education."

Addressing the same appeals to Americans from every background, Clinton explained that

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activist government could advance mainstream values—work and family, opportunity, responsibility, and community. Far from avoiding anything that sounded like "class struggle," he tapped into public anger at irresponsible corporate behavior, declaring: "It's important to remember that the most irresponsible people of all in the 1980s were those at the top quarter, those who sold out our workers and our country with bad deals and spent billions of dollars on wasteful debt." He linked anxieties about economic stagnation and social breakdown: "Our country is growing apart when we should be growing together."

AND THEN he responded with a program: tax credits for low-wage workers; tax increases on only the wealthiest one percent; investments in education and training; and a courageous but overly complex plan for universal health coverage.

Similar appeals on social and economic issues—most notably the famous "E2M2": education and the environment, Medicare and Medicaid—contributed to Clinton's re-election in 1996. Progressives in the United Kingdom, Germany, and France likewise won as champions of working people pledged to fight unemployment, raise the minimum wage, and defend social insurance. The workforce of the new economy—blue-collar, white-collar, and technical worker—provided their majorities.

All this argues for a new progressive politics that melds mainstream values with an appeal to economic insecurities. There is no political imperative to narrowly target the most affluent, educated, and secure.

It is not difficult to envision what such a politics might look like: a politics that would be both *popular* (in the sense of commanding majority support) and *progressive* (in the sense of meeting goals of social justice and broadly shared prosperity). Start with Social Security. As the Clinton administration has realized, privatization of the system is a loser, both in terms of politics and policy. However, it is *not* necessary from either perspective to wall off most of the surplus to "save" the system and pay down the national debt at the same time. Better to develop an alternative plan that uses less of the surplus and shifts the focus from debt reduction to investment in public goods like health care and education. Polls continue to show strong public interest in comprehensive health care reform and support that's practically off the charts for improving American education. Time, then, to make a serious down payment on univeral health care security and rebuilding and modernizing American public schools. All this could be wrapped into a package under the theme of "economic security for the twenty-first century" that would both appeal to the typical voter and seem in sync with vicissitudes of today's economy.

And this package could and should be broadened to the international level. Americans are understandably concerned about the effects of global economic instability on their lives. Although this instability has yet to make itself deeply felt in this country, a distinct air of nervousness characterizes the public view toward the world economy. Time to speak to that insecurity by advocating reform of the world economic, particularly financial, system. Flows of financial capital should be regulated, labor and environmental standards should be enforced, and international institutions like the International Monetary Fund should cease their unrelenting focus on fiscal austerity that has imploded one economy after another in the developing world. The United States is obviously the country most capable of leading the world toward such reforms—reforms that recognize new global economic realities while continuing to pursue traditional goals of growth and trade expansion. The American public would strongly support such an approach—and a global economy hanging in the balance demands it.

The New Economy

Progressives should steadfastly reject the conventional wisdom advanced by opinion leaders from Newt Gingrich to some in the DLC: that the Information Age diminishes the need for public investments and progressive institutions. In fact, the decline in stable employment with rising wages, secure jobs, and stable benefits in most businesses may well argue for an enhanced role by every level of government and a revitalized labor movement to offer opportunity and security for the new workforce.

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Similarly, the growth of global trade requires that international investors and multinational corporations should be held accountable for their actions, from labor and environmental standards to restrictions on sudden capital flows.

There are promising signs that some of these points are being taken seriously. For example, the Clinton administration has embraced the concept of a global New Deal, with labor and environmental standards. The DLC has commendably entered into a dialogue with the unions about the role of workers' organizations in a new economy. And Vice President Gore has repeatedly spoken of the importance of unions and the inviolability of the right to organize.

In this spirit, the third way can represent an advance, not an abandonment, of progressive traditions, as political successes get translated into policy achievements that really improve people's lives. Such a third way would have a very good chance of outliving its buzzword phase—which we are now in—and truly transforming American politics and economics. Progressives should be pushing for such an outcome and not leave the third way discussion to those who wish to monopolize it and shape it as a political approach that disregards problems of economic insecurity, minimizes the role of government, and targets only the most affluent voters. ●

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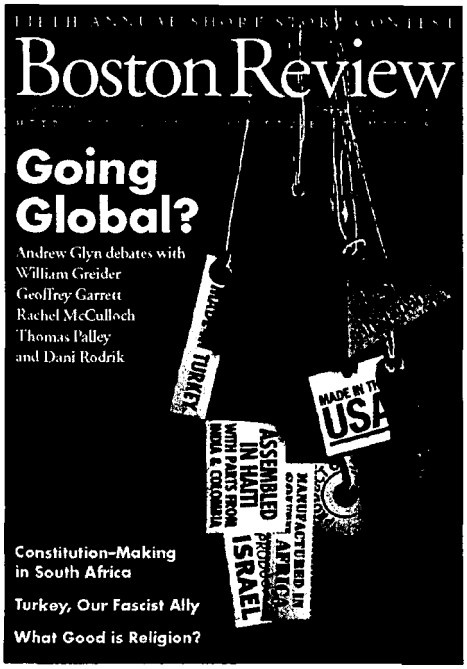

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Egalitarian Strategies

John E. Roemer

We on the left are in search of a new model for egalitarian society, after the definitive failure of what was called communism, and the evident victory, on an international scale, of capitalism. In my view, however, labeling that search as one for a "third way" or a "fourth way" is misguided. There are a finite number of strategies that we know, and none of them has been exhausted. Or perhaps I should say, it is a popular but false inference that the failure of communism implies the exhaustion of all egalitarian prospects. That is far from the truth.

To begin, I must state two ground rules for thinking about this question. First, any complex society must use markets. Markets decentralize the allocation of resources and commodities, a process that is hopelessly complex for a central planner to carry out. This is one of the market's chief virtues. The second virtue is that markets, in the presence of competition among firms, induce innovation. If innovation is necessary in any modern society—a point I will address presently—then markets are useful, and perhaps necessary. Any proposal that entertains the possibility of dispensing with markets is, I think, utopian. Second, I assume that, in designing blueprints for egalitarian society, we take people to behave, *in their economic decisions*, in a self-regarding manner. People choose how much skill to acquire, what profession to enter, and how hard to work, with an eye to advancing their own welfare and the welfare of their family. This is not inconsistent with the view, which I also hold, that individuals may behave altruistically as political agents—for instance, when they vote. A person, for example, may vote for higher taxes to finance benefits for the disadvantaged, yet at the same time take every tax break available to him when filling out his income tax form. It is unrealistic to assume that people, in general, will not behave in a self-regarding manner in their personal economic decisions. One day, perhaps, after people have experienced equality and when an egalitarian ethos has been established, people may become less self-regarding in their economic decisions. What is now relevant for us, however, is the period of transition.

I shall restrict most, although not all, of my comments to the problem of egalitarian reform within a nation. The task of international reform, although by far more important, has barely begun. This is a mark of the ethical immaturity of humans during this period in our history—for by far the greatest injustice in the world is the unequal chances that people have by virtue of being born into particular countries. Two hundred years from now, people may look upon John Rawls as a hopelessly parochial philosopher, who virtually ignored, in his classic work, this glaring injustice. But, with worse luck, this assessment might have to wait five hundred years.

I restrict myself here to national egalitarian projects, for these are ones with which we have more experience, and which are on the agenda. I referred to a finite number of strategies for egalitarian improvements. These are the following:

(1) a reassignment of property rights in firms, so that profit income is distributed in a more egalitarian manner among citizens;

(2) the tax-and-transfer mechanism—chiefly, the welfare state;

(3) increased expenditures on education, with disproportionate expenditure for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and

(4) the narrowing of wage differentials.

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I shall refer to these four strategies, respectively, as profit equalization, tax and transfer, education, and the solidaristic wage.

I want to evaluate each of these four strategies with respect to three criteria: economic feasibility, political feasibility, and expected payoff. I say a strategy is *economically feasible* if, were it enacted, neither the size of national income nor its rate of growth over time would fall appreciably. If a strategy is not economically feasible in this sense, then I think it is a non-starter, for as long as there are conventional capitalist societies that can dominate an egalitarian society with respect to the rate of growth of the gross national product (GNP), then the egalitarian society is bound to fail. We are, after all, assuming democratic politics and good international communication. The citizens of a country in which the rate of growth is low, or perhaps even negative, will not long put up with that situation if it could be rectified by a transition to conventional capitalism. This I assume without proof; most citizens in a democratic polity will not accept a standard of living appreciably less than they could have under an alternative set of institutions. It is this factor that largely explains the peaceful implosion of the Soviet societies: once Gorbachev gave the signal that the USSR would not send troops into East Germany were the government to fall, it fell with barely a whimper of reaction from the leadership. It was patently obvious that the regime had failed to keep the living standards of its populace up to those of their German counterparts across the border, a failing that, given the level of education of the East Germans, was impossible to justify. Granted, the Easterners wanted Western civil liberties as well, but I think the trumping factor was the differential in the standard of living.

But economic feasibility is far from sufficient to guarantee that a strategy will be implemented. There is the problem of getting there from here, and that involves politics. So the second question is, to what extent is the proposed strategy politically feasible, by which I mean, can we persuade a democratic polity to demand and implement it? The key issue is the distributive consequences of implementing the strategy. If a powerful section of the polity loses by its implementation—such as the capitalist class—then we can expect it will be difficult to implement.

The third question is, how effective would the strategy be, if implemented, in equalizing the distribution of income, wealth, and well-being? This is what I call the strategy's payoff.

Reassigning Profits

Let me begin, then, with the strategy of profit equalization, that is, of a reallocation of property rights in the nation's firms so that profits flow, in a more equal fashion, to all the citizenry. This can take two forms: first, the profits of firms can flow into the state treasury, which then provides public goods or transfer payments, either equally consumed in the population or disproportionately consumed by those who are poorer; second, dividends are paid to individuals, in a manner more egalitarian than is characteristic of dividend payments in a typical capitalist society. In turn, the first of these ways could be implemented either by very large taxes on profits, or by nationalization of firms, while the second could be implemented in a variety of ways. I have recently proposed the possibility of each citizen's having a right to a per capita share of the nation's profits as a "social dividend," a right that the citizen cannot transfer to anyone else. There are, in fact, several proposals around similar to mine, from economists (for example, Richard Freeman, James Meade) and political theorists (for example, Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott).

How economically feasible are such "socialist property rights"? Your first response might be: this has been tried, and has failed—look at the Soviet experiment. But the Soviet experiment was characterized by the confluence of three characteristics, which together, in my view, entailed failure: (1) the state ownership of firms, (2) administrative, rather than market, resource allocation, and (3) noncompetitive (that is, nondemocratic) politics. As I said, I am assuming market allocation and competitive (democratic) politics are in place, and so we can make no inferences about the economic feasibility of equalizing profits, under these other circumstances, from

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the Soviet experience. This simple, logical point is ignored by those who now proclaim that capitalism is only at the beginning of its thousand-year reign.

Nevertheless, it is far from obvious that either nationalization of a nation's firms or the reassignment of rights to profit streams in a more decentralized way to citizens is economically feasible. I will argue, however, for their feasibility, if they are properly implemented.

To begin, what is the supposed social function of allowing profits to be highly concentrated—in Marxian lingo, of allowing highly concentrated ownership of the means of production? There are two central justifications: entrepreneurship and monitoring of firm management.

THE FIRST justification is that the prize of the profits is necessary to induce entrepreneurs to put their good ideas into social practice, to develop commodities that satisfy the needs or wants of others. I think this may have been true in the early years of capitalism, and may still be true in developing countries. But the fact is that, today, in advanced societies, most research and development is carried out by salaried workers in large firms, and so it is questionable how much individual entrepreneurial activity is needed for innovation. Of course, there are individuals like Bill Gates, who invent software in their garage that eventually transforms an entire industry. But it is certainly not obvious that such entrepreneurs are necessary today.

The modern theory of finance has more or less downplayed this social function of capitalist property arrangements, and emphasized another. The modern corporation, it is agreed, is not run by entrepreneurs, but by managers, who are paid to maximize profits for shareholders. There is, therefore, what economists call a principal-agent problem: how can the shareholders make sure that the manager is doing a good job? It is costly to monitor management, and the small shareholder has no incentive to do so, for the costs of monitoring are far greater than the higher dividends accruing to the shareholder from better management. The only shareholders who have an economic incentive to monitor are very large ones, for whom an increase in profits would make a significant difference in the dividend stream or the capitalized value of their shares. So the social function of highly unequal ownership of firm shares is the provision of management monitoring services.

In fact, the argument continues, the transfer of control of firms through stock acquisition is the key feature that ensures that management acts in the interest of shareholders. If a firm is poorly managed, and profits fall, shareholders will sell, lowering the price of the stock. This is a signal to a corporate raider, who buys a controlling interest in the firm, fires management, and replaces it with new, more profit-oriented management. Profits rise, investors purchase the shares, and the stock price rises. The incentive for the raider is the capital gain on shares. Thus, the potential for individuals to purchase large blocs of shares is, according to this theory, what solves the principal-agent problem between management and shareholders.

At most, what this argument establishes is that standard capitalism—allowing unlimited accumulations of stock—is one way of monitoring management. It turns out, however, that this mechanism is important in only two capitalist countries, the United States and the United Kingdom. In other successful capitalist countries, chiefly Japan and Germany, monitoring is undertaken by financial institutions of various kinds. Since World War II, only one firm has changed hands in Germany in a hostile takeover. Investors buy and sell shares on the stock markets in these countries, but control of management is vested in boards of directors made up, chiefly, of representatives of financial institutions (and labor, in the case of Germany), which take a long-term view of firm management. It is beyond my scope to expand on this process here. But the bottom line is that the success of organizational monitoring in Japan and Germany indicates that individual ownership of large blocs of firm shares is unnecessary either to induce innovation or to monitor management.

This argument is somewhat heretical (among economists) in claiming that there is a *degree of freedom* in the distribution of property rights in firms, a parameter that can be

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varied without altering the efficiency of the system. In particular, I claim that it would be possible for corporate shares to be held approximately equally across the population, and for firms to be monitored by institutions, without a loss in efficiency. On the other hand, it is less clear to me that there is such a degree of freedom with respect to the allocation of wage income. I am skeptical that, in a market economy, we can drastically alter wage differentials without harming economic efficiency—which, bottom line, means the growth of national income. I will return to this point.

Firms must remain competitive for innovation to continue. Thus, a key error of the Soviet experiment was to shield firms from competition—either from other firms in the nation or from international competition through participation in trade. And we know the consequences for Soviet consumers, whose goods (such as cars) were at least twenty years behind the international frontier by the mid-1980s. So, *if* nationalization of firms were the manner for socializing profits, and *if* nationalization also eliminated competition, then it would not be economically feasible. My claim is that there are egalitarian ways of reallocating profits that are economically feasible.

Let me briefly describe a decentralized way of equalizing profit streams. Each young adult would receive a portfolio of stock in the nation's firms. She would be entitled to trade these stocks at prices quoted on a competitive stock market, but she could not cash out her portfolio—that is, capitalize it. Formally, these trades would be carried out with a "coupon currency" that was the only acceptable tender on the stock market. In turn, firms could trade coupons received from issuing stock at the state Treasury for investment funds. Owning shares of a firm would entitle the owner to dividends from the firm in the usual manner. At death, an individual's stock portfolio would escheat to the Treasury, to be recirculated to young adults. Monitoring of firms would be done by various financial institutions, not by shareholders.

How about the political feasibility of equalizing dividend streams? I think this strategy ranks low on this dimension. The reason is that reallocating corporate profits would dramatically hurt a small but extremely powerful group—the very wealthy, the big capitalists. In the United States, 88 percent of corporate shares are owned by the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. This class would use every manner at its disposal—its control of the media, its ability to bribe politicians (what is politely called lobbying)—to prevent the reallocation of corporate profits. Nevertheless, the political feasibility of this strategy is not zero. We see beginnings of it in employee-share ownership programs (ESOPs). And a policy of distributing shares to ordinary citizens could be combined with trade-union promises to hold back wage increases, thus lowering unemployment—the social dividend would substitute for some fraction of wage increases. It is easy to demonstrate that, in an economy in which profits are equally distributed, it is in the interest of the working class to advocate wage rates at which unemployment is zero—which is not true when profits go to a small class.

What about the payoff of this strategy? The immediate payoff would be relatively small, because profits make up only between 20 percent and 25 percent of national income in most advanced countries. If mean household income is about $40, 000 in the United States, then profit income is about $8,000 per household. Thus, households that currently have no income from dividends would add about $8,000 to their income under an equal-profits scenario—assuming that total profits would not fall from the reorganization of property rights, which they well might. This dividend may suffice to raise most poor families above the poverty line, as it is currently defined, but it would hardly engender the kind of equality that we egalitarians prize. And because the short-term payoff is relatively small, the strategy ranks low, again, in political feasibility. For a small, well-organized and powerful group stands to lose a lot, while a large and unorganized group stands to gain a little. This is a classic situation in which the small group gets what it wants.

Nevertheless, the long-term payoff of the equal-profits strategy is high, because the

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elimination of the class of individuals whose great wealth comes from corporate profits would remove the greatest stumbling block to creating a society with an egalitarian ethos. The main source of inegalitarian ideology in capitalist countries is the capitalist class, which must create, through every means at its disposal, the belief among citizens that its manner of acquiring income is not only socially necessary but morally legitimate. This it attempts to do by sponsoring ideological work in the academy, and through education, advertising, and the dissemination of ideology through the media. Without a small class that benefits so obscenely from profits, this ideological counterweight to an egalitarian ethos would dissolve. In fact, in the social democracies, it is already much less socially acceptable to flaunt one's wealth than in the relatively laissez-faire regime of the United States.

Tax and Transfer

We know that tax and transfer is a feasible strategy in capitalist societies, as it has already been implemented to a considerable extent in Europe, especially in the five Nordic countries. I do not think that the tapering off of the rate of growth of the welfare state is a leading indicator of its decline: in Europe the welfare state is here to stay. In large part, this is due to the experiences of European countries with high unemployment. Citizens there understand that the income stream is risky, and they will continue to demand social insurance. Of course, the welfare state is not perfect. Many believe that the current distribution of transfers is skewed too much toward the old. For instance, in Italy more than half of men in their late twenties still live with their parents; transfer payments filter down to the young through their parents, which is not the optimal arrangement.

Why have the Asian tigers not developed European-style welfare states? I believe the answer is that, in the period of the rapid rise of East Asian capitalism—in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Indonesia—the rate of growth has been high and unemployment low. So these countries have not seen the need for social insurance. (As well, there is a long history of transfers within the family in these societies.) One result of the current Asian depression may well be a growing demand for social insurance.

There seems to be a strong correlation between the degree of cultural homogeneity of European countries—linguistic, religious, and ethnic—and the depth of their welfare states. The Nordic countries, during the period of the development of the welfare state, were each homogeneous and small societies. The link is not hard to see. Citizens in such societies can more easily sympathize with less fortunate fellow citizens than in societies in which economic fortune is correlated with race and/or a particular ethnic culture. Racism, in a word, remains a divisive element in large, heterogeneous societies, such as the United States and Britain—and also, now, in France. There are at least two linkages through which racism weakens the welfare state: first, because the members of majority ethnic groups fail politically to support transfer payments, which they view as benefiting mainly undeserving minorities, and second, because racial division weakens the labor movement, which historically has been a key element in support of the welfare state.

In countries with a small welfare state, such as the United States, the opponents of its expansion make essentially two arguments. I have already mentioned the first: the likely beneficiaries of an expanded welfare state are undeserving. A widespread popular view is that, to the extent that citizens are poor by virtue of bad luck, they deserve to receive social transfers, but to the extent that their condition is due to low effort, they do not. So the first strategy of welfare-state opponents is to paint the poor as lazy. The second strategy is to argue that the expansion of the welfare state is not, in our terminology, economically feasible. The opponents claim that increasing taxation will squelch the desire of individuals to get ahead; the talented will fail to develop their talents, or will withdraw their valuable labor from the market, and those who own capital will shift it to societies with less taxation. There are disagreements about the elasticity of labor supply with respect to the tax

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rate, but the preponderance of evidence is that labor-supply reaction to taxation is small. Moreover, the rate of growth of the Scandinavian economies in the postwar period has been at least as high as of European economies generally, and so it is hard to claim that a large welfare state is inimical to growth.

Nevertheless, these two conservative arguments—that the poor are undeserving and that taxation will kill the golden goose—surely have a hold on electorates in some countries. Therefore, although I am convinced that large welfare states are everywhere economically feasible, their political feasibility is sometimes quite low. The payoff of this strategy is high. Life is very much better for almost everyone, and massively better for the unskilled, in welfare states than in other states. This point need hardly be labored here.

Education

The third strategy on my list is education, and by that I mean a disproportionately large investment in the education of children from disadvantaged families, through both schooling and job training. In most countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the public financial investment in the education of children is roughly equal across children in the nation. This is a great egalitarian accomplishment. Prior to this century, it was mainly male children of the wealthy who were educated. Some countries, however, the United States among them, have still not accomplished this equalization. In the United States, public schools are mainly financed through local property taxes, so that municipalities with wealthy citizens and valuable real estate have more schools with greater resources than other municipalities. Indeed, the variation in local public school funding per student in the United States is probably on the order of four to one.

But equal investment in all children is not the true egalitarian strategy. For education is the main conduit through which children can be compensated for growing up in families that lack the experience of education, or do not value education, or lack financial resources to invest in their children. In the United States, at least, the popular conception of equal opportunity is one of "leveling the playing field," and with respect to a generation of children, the troughs and gullies in the playing field are the disadvantages children face, in the process of acquiring education and training, that are due to the circumstances of the families into which they are born. Thus, equalizing opportunities for leading a decent life requires compensatory spending on the education of disadvantaged children.

I have calculated what would be required, with respect to educational finance, to equalize opportunities for future earning capacity of black and white children in the United States. We would have to spend approximately ten times as much on the education of blacks, per capita, as on whites. In contrast, to equalize the opportunities for children across families of low and high socioeconomic status would require a compensatory financial ratio of about eight to one.

In other advanced countries, disproportionate educational spending on children from relatively disadvantaged families would also be the main strategy for equalizing opportunities. There is a standard way of measuring the extent to which opportunities have been equalized in a society. One looks at the transition matrix of its citizens with respect to economic class. Suppose we partition society into three economic classes—poor, middle, and well-off. Then a society in which, say, 20 percent of children become poor adults, 50 percent become middle-class adults, and 30 percent become well-off adults, *independent* of what class their parents were, would be one that has achieved equality of opportunity, even though it has not achieved equality. That kind of equal opportunity is, in my view, a major goal, and it has nowhere been achieved, although some advanced countries have come closer to achieving it than others.

I BELIEVE the political feasibility of an equal-opportunity educational strategy is medium. I rank it thus, and not low, because of the ethic, quite deeply held in contemporary Western citizenries, of equal opportunity. There are many studies that show that citizens in European and North American countries believe it is right for society to compen-

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sate people who have suffered by virtue of ill luck, and children's growing up in disadvantaged families is a prime instance of ill luck. Of course, implementing a strategy of equal-opportunity educational spending would require some creativity. Clearly, one does not want to put children from economically disadvantaged families in special classes. In the United States, there is a fairly easy way to implement the strategy—endow schools in disadvantaged areas with larger budgets. This strategy works if economic classes are residentially segregated; I don't know to what extent this holds true in Europe.

I rate the payoff of the education strategy as high. It is far preferable to equalize the earning capacities of citizens than simply to equalize their incomes through transfer payments. For earning capacity reflects personal achievements highly correlated with self-realization and self-esteem. Increasing a person's income through transfer payments will also increase self-esteem to some degree, because it enables the person to acquire the means of life without shame, but transfer payments will do much less than education. There is a fraction of people in modern society who would prefer to live off transfer payments rather than work, but the fraction of people who have those preferences *and* have training enabling them to perform interesting and meaningful work is very small. I certainly do not believe that the only valuable work is paid work, but in market economies most people will count their lives as successful only if they are capable of performing paid work.

The Solidaristic Wage

My fourth egalitarian strategy is the narrowing of wage and salary differentials. Clearly, if wage differentials are narrowed by virtue of the narrowing of skill differentials, there is no problem for economic feasibility. The more interesting question concerns the scope for narrowing wage and salary differentials without a change in the distribution of skills in the workforce. This question, in turn, requires asking: to what extent does the market require the degree of wage differentiation that we see in most capitalist economies?

Economists don't know very much about this important question. We have a theory that says, first, that in a competitive labor market, workers will be paid wages equal to their marginal productivities, and second, that wages must have that property for allocational efficiency. Moreover, there is the second, and different, claim that substantial wage differentiation is needed as an incentive to get people to undergo the costly training required for the acquisition of certain skills. I am much more skeptical about the second justification for substantial wage differentiation than the first. For I think that performing highly skilled work brings its own rewards—as such work generally requires a good deal of autonomy in the workplace and hence engenders self-realization and self-esteem. The United States would still have an ample supply of good physicians were the salaries for most types of physician to fall by 50 percent. And, I should say, very softly, that the salaries of the American professorate could fall by at least 25 percent without substantially diminishing the supply of skilled labor in that sector.

The more difficult question concerns allocational efficiency of skilled labor. Here, we must know to what extent wages and salaries in different jobs are created by custom, and to what extent they are created by competitive market forces. If the former, then perhaps a new custom can be created without harming economic efficiency. If the latter, then narrowing wage differentials through some kind of institutional mechanism would probably have substantial economic costs.

There is evidence that custom plays an important role in the setting of wages and salaries, but that evidence is contested by proponents of competitive markets. An important example that fits the custom view is the salary level of top management in U.S. firms. It is not uncommon for American CEOs to earn ten times as much as their counterparts in Japan. (The most highly paid American CEOs "earn" about $50 million per annum.) The simple conclusion is that the CEOs in *one* of these countries are not being paid a salary that is socially necessary; if one thinks that Japanese firms are about as well run as American firms, then one must conclude that American CEOs are earning a very large rent that could

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be reallocated without harming economic efficiency. A second example is the remuneration of "women's work." Elementary school teachers and nurses receive salaries that are lower than those men receive in other professions that are not traditionally dominated by women, and that, many people think, require approximately the same degree of talent and training.

A SIGNIFICANT national experiment with the narrowing of wage differentials occurred in Sweden—the so-called solidaristic wage policy, proposed initially by the Swedish economist Rudolf Meidner in the 1950s and implemented for about twenty-five years, beginning in the early sixties. Meidner's original proposal was to equalize the wages of workers who were performing similar work in different firms in the same industry. In practice, this meant raising the wages of workers in less profitable firms. One of the motivations was fairness, but another was to force inefficient firms out of business, thus maintaining the competitiveness of the Swedish economy. Over time, however, this "solidaristic wage policy" was reinterpreted as a call to narrow the wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers. The organization of Swedish trade unions, the LO, negotiated according to this mandate with the capitalists' association. Capitalists supported the original conception of the solidaristic wage, because of its role in culling the inefficient firms; their support for the narrowing of wage differentials was mixed—it lowered skilled wages but also made it more difficult to recruit skilled workers. In addition, the growth of white-collar (service industry) jobs chipped away at the solidaristic wage policy, as these workers did not wish to be constrained by it. The policy was eventually abandoned, successfully opposed by a coalition of some capitalists, white-collar workers, and skilled workers.

A quite different kind of reform might narrow wage differentials, but not through institutional fiat. Suppose work is organized by production teams, so that the marginal productivity of an individual becomes ambiguous. Teams produce output, and wages are paid to teams. The team then divides up its income among its members, according to a rule that, it believes, maximizes productivity. In this case, economic theory suggests that teams would be paid according to the marginal productivity principle, but it has nothing (or little) to say about how the team should or would divide up its income. Indeed, it would not be surprising if the distribution of income among team members were quite egalitarian: that kind of equality might lead to a productivity-enhancing esprit de corps. (Why don't capitalist firms simply view their labor force as a team and apply the same egalitarian principle? Because the esprit-de-corps effect, perhaps, can only work in relatively small groups, where individuals feel a responsibility to their comrades and where norms easily develop to prevent shirking.) I don't have much evidence for the payoff of this kind of reform, but mention it as a theoretical possibility. Indeed, the more egalitarian structure of wages in Japan may reflect the fact that Japanese production is more team centered than U.S. production.

DESPITE THESE positive remarks, I remain skeptical about the economic feasibility of wage compression. For classical theory tells us that, in a market economy, wages must reflect marginal productivities to achieve allocational efficiency—in this case, of labor within and across firms. The counter-arguments I have provided either claim that the actual wage structure of market economies does not reflect marginal productivities, despite the theory of competition, or that marginal productivities can be changed through the reorganization of work. I draw an important distinction between the distribution of profit income and of wage and salary income. As I said earlier, I believe that profits, in advanced capitalist economies—though perhaps not in developing ones, where entrepreneurship is still very important—make up a true economic surplus, in the sense that their distribution can be altered without negative economic consequences. I am much less confident that that degree of freedom exists with respect to the distribution of wages and salaries.

What about the political feasibility of wage compression? The only example we have of a national program, the Scandinavian case, in-

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volved a very high degree of union density—about 90 percent of workers in Sweden belonged to unions represented by the LO. It is not clear how such a policy would be organized without the active involvement of unions, unless employers transform work practices according to the team model I briefly outlined. In a country like the United States, where only 12 percent of the labor force is now unionized, the political feasibility of this reform seems distant.

The payoff from such a reform, however, would be significant. As I said, there is a value to equalizing wages beyond achieving the same redistributive effect through equalizing incomes—the self-esteem effect. Workers in a market economy who receive approximately equal wages are viewed as approximately equal in social value, and that would increase the self-esteem of formerly low paid workers.

I summarize the foregoing analysis in a table. Naturally, one must be cautious about this kind of qualitative analysis, lest the summary be given too much weight.

EFFECTIVENESS OF FOUR EGALITARIAN STRATEGIES

	Economic Feasibility	Political Feasibility	Payoff
equal profits	High	Low	High
tax and transfer	High	Medium	Medium
education	High	Medium	High
wage compression	Medium	Low	Medium

From this table, we notice that "education" is a *dominant strategy:* it ties or dominates each of the other three strategies, on each of the three dimensions of "effectiveness." I wish to reiterate a distinction among various strategies in the "payoff" column. I rate the "equal profits" strategy high not so much because of the short-run increment in income that it would produce, but because the euthanasia of the capitalist class would wipe out the central ideologically reactionary interest group in our societies, the class that is, by and large, economically superfluous, and has the greatest interest in perpetrating false consciousness, both with respect to its own economic role and with respect to an egalitarian ethic.

Of the four strategies, three—all except tax and transfer—have the virtue of increasing the *earnings* of individuals, if they succeed, not just the *incomes* of individuals. This is obviously so for the education and wage compression strategies, and it's also true of the equal profits strategy, because, were firms nationalized or privatized in the egalitarian fashion of the coupon economy, the ethos would be that every citizen has a *right* to her per capita share in the stream of profits of the nation's firms. The nation's firms would be viewed as the nation's forests are in the United States, a resource belonging to all citizens, and which no citizen would be allowed to capture. (It may come as a surprise to Europeans to learn that virtually all forests are publicly owned in the United States; one-third of the land in the western United States is publicly owned. Many of these resources are leased to private firms at rates far below their market value.) Thus, corporate dividends flowing to individuals would be a dividend to the citizenry, not a transfer payment from one group of citizens to another. And clearly, were profits to flow into the state treasury, people would have no difficulty in viewing them as publicly owned, from a moral viewpoint.

The United States already provides an example of a corporate social dividend. The state of Alaska owns rich oil deposits. Each year, every Alaskan citizen receives her per capita share of the oil profits, a dividend of somewhat more than $1,000. Of course this property right is not transferable to others; it cannot be capitalized (sold), and it escheats to the state if the individual leaves Alaska.

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National/Global Reforms

I have ignored until now the issue of the feasibility of *national* reforms. To what extent can these reforms be implemented in a world of frictionless capital and labor flows? The "equal profits" and "tax-and-transfer" strategies are perhaps most likely to induce capital flight; all four strategies, if successful, would increase the pressure for immigration. The advanced countries have not, perhaps unfortunately, been too troubled by restricting inward flows of people.

It is beyond my scope, here, to discuss the capital flight issue carefully. My intuition is that egalitarian reforms are not seriously compromised by the international capital market. There are two parts to this intuition, the first economic, and the second ethical. I think the advantages to capital of having a home base in the advanced countries are immense—and would be even larger, should the advanced countries manage to increase substantially the level of effective literacy and numeracy of the citizenry. (This would increase both the quality of labor and the demand for sophisticated consumption commodities.) That is, in brief, the economic part. Capital flight to developing countries has been, and will continue to be, only a marginal option. Of course, as the labor forces in developing countries become more skilled, the attractiveness to capital of locating there increases—but as they become more skilled, they will also earn higher wages and organize for social reform—meaning the taxation of profits.

The ethical intuition is that capital flight of the long-term variety, when it occurs, is largely progressive. Its consequence is to raise the incomes of workers who are far poorer than workers in the advanced countries. As egalitarians, we must count this a good thing. Thus, while egalitarian reforms in the advanced countries may be limited by the possibility of capital's exit, the international egalitarian effects of the demand for reforms (in the advanced countries) increase.

This brings me to what I think has been the moral equivalent of an Achilles' heel in the position of large segments of the European and North American left—its national chauvinism. As I said, the inequality of average incomes across nations is far graver in its effects on human self-realization than the inequality between the average income and the highest income in an advanced country. Prior to the advent of democracy—that is, roughly prior to 1900—it was possible to view international inequality as an unalterable feature of the world. It is naive to believe that nations run by aristocrats, capitalists, and monarchists could have any interest in expending resources, altruistically, to encourage economic development in poor countries. But with the advent of democracy and the welfare state, the capacity for citizens to consider and implement international redistribution has been enhanced. Sweden leads the world: it spends about 0.7 percent of its gross national product on non-military aid to developing countries, and the other Scandinavian social democracies are not far behind. This is perhaps the most devastating single statistic testifying to the ethical immaturity of our human society.

THUS, IF capital flees as a result of egalitarian reforms in an advanced country, that is not a defeat: for the odds are that the beneficent welfare consequences of that flight will exceed the benefits sacrificed at home, from a moral viewpoint. In like manner, I think the opposition that some hold to European integration is retrograde. For integration will inevitably redistribute some fraction of the national income from some producers in rich countries, to *poorer* producers in other parts of Europe, chiefly in the south. So the oppositional posture is only ethically defensible from a chauvinistic standpoint, which values the lives of fellow citizens more than the lives of fellow humans. There is indeed a philosophical view—communitarianism—that attempts to justify this kind of chauvinism. The left should reject it.

Although I believe that the left, at the moment, is itself somewhat chauvinistic, there is a non-trivial general question about the ethics of building egalitarian societies in an unequal world. The question arises when such a society has to restrict immigration. What is the ethically optimal level of immigration for an egalitarian society? If one were to apply the

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Rawlsian difference principle, then one would allow immigration until the worst-off group in the host country were almost as badly off as the worst-off group in the rest of the world. (However, note that a Rawlsian would stop immigration before that point had been reached, if it set off virulent fascist and anti-immigrant movements in the host country.) European countries have arguably limited immigration far more than they should, given the egalitarian argument. What one has to judge is the value to human society of having successful egalitarian sub-societies. The European welfare states provide the rest of the world with an example of immeasurable importance. There is, therefore, a value in protecting that example, even if the cost of that protection is the exclusion of people who are much worse off than the beneficiaries of the national welfare state.

Nevertheless, I think that the advanced welfare states have erred on the chauvinistic side. It would provide an even greater example to the rest of the world were these citizenries to allow their levels of per capita national income to fall somewhat as a consequence of holding the doors slightly more ajar to poorly educated immigrants. It is surely the left that must take the lead on internationalist issues of this kind.

To sum up, I believe that the left has four principal strategies for egalitarian reform, and that we should elaborate upon, and organize for, all of them. The strategy of disproportionate investment in the education of children from disadvantaged class and ethnic groups is the most promising, all things considered. What we should have learned from the failure of communism is not that humans are by nature greedy or that capitalism is the optimal system for human development today, but rather that a system made up of non-democratic politics, and non-market, noncompetitive economics will not work. Political and economic theory can explain this failure quite easily. But paying attention to economic incentives, which societies must do as long as individuals are self-regarding, does not require régimes of highly inegalitarian property rights, nor highly inegalitarian distributions of wealth. (It is worth noting that Asian capitalism, despite the lack of social insurance, is much more egalitarian than American and some European capitalism. The concentration of wealth is a far cry from what it is the United States and the United Kingdom.) The principal moral weakness in the left in advanced countries is its chauvinism, which leads it to consider increases in the incomes of people in the poorer two-thirds of the world only as an afterthought. The period that we in the first world call the Crisis—roughly the last twenty years—has seen hundreds of millions of people, perhaps billions, acquire literacy and rise out of poverty in Asia. And a significant number of these are in China, where economic growth has *not* been due to capitalism, but largely to harnessing the skills of the population without having to dangle the plum of private capital accumulation. (Of course, there are large capitalist firms in China. But the chief factor in economic growth has been the formation of small enterprise, and even enterprises that are collectively owned at the municipal level. These are called township and village enterprises.)

One can never say that some new "third way" will not materialize. But there are at least four egalitarian strategies that we have, mostly, only begun to exploit. Although workers and other citizens in advanced countries have more to lose than their chains, they still have a world to win. ●

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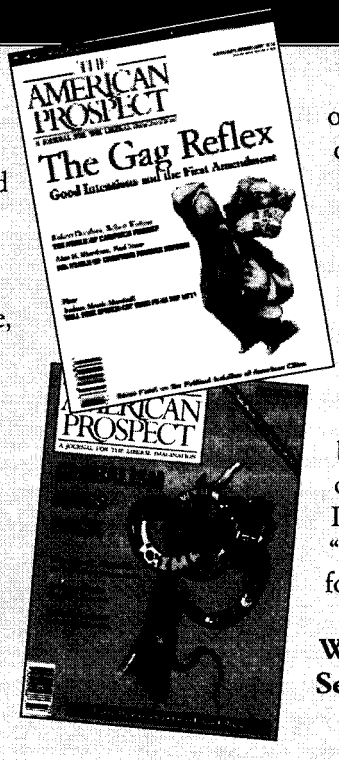

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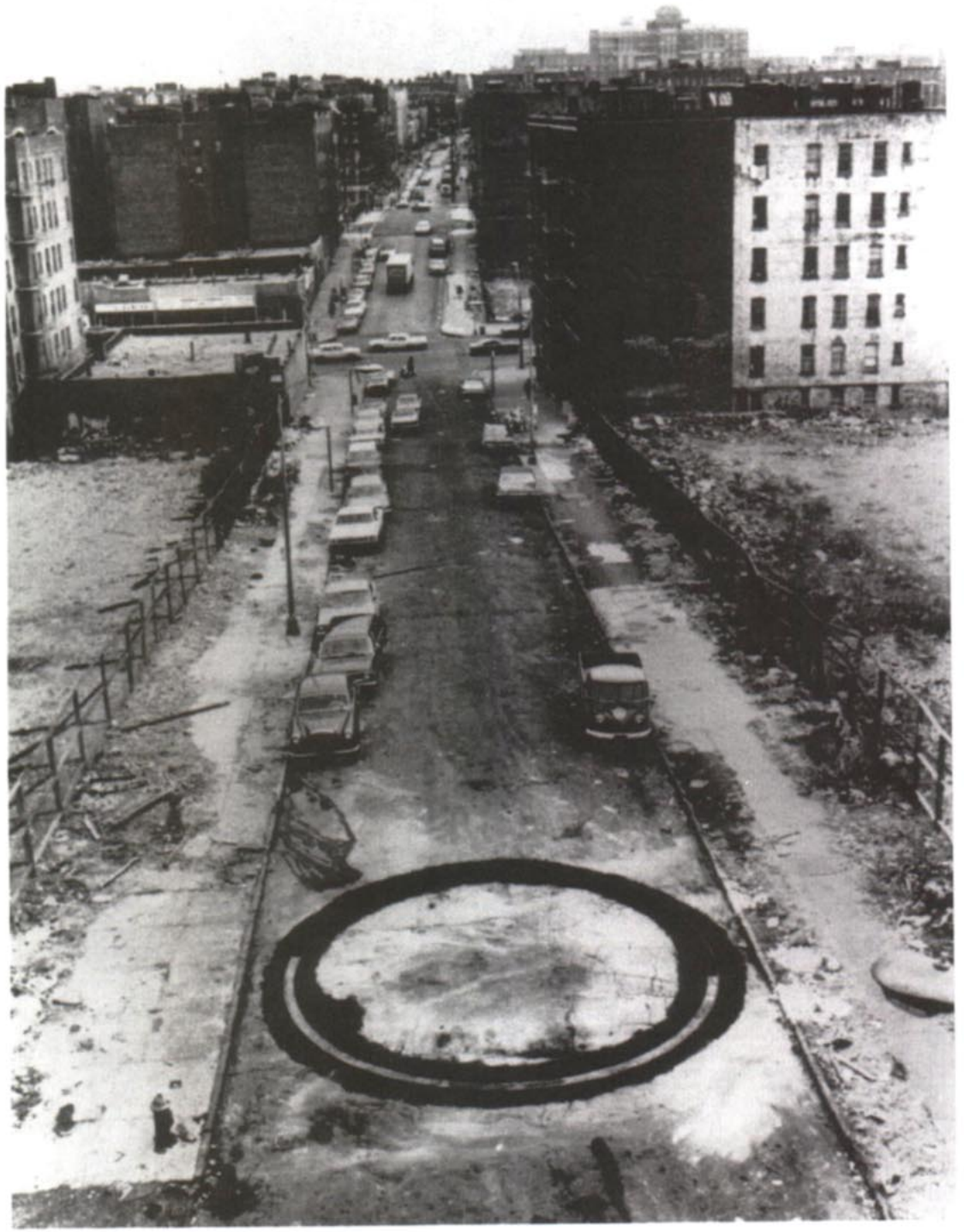

Richard Serra, *To Encircle Base Hexagram, Right Angles Inverted*, 1970. Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni

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Views from the Burning Bridge

I exclaimed with sadness, "Are ruins, then, already here?"
-Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

When my friends from home come to visit, I try to show them Central Park, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Metropolitan Museum, but they say, "Where is the South Bronx? Take me to the burning buildings! I want a lover from the ruins."
-A Swiss art critic in conversation, early 1980s

Marshall Berman

The big thing about any New York neighborhood is its relationship to the center. The city center in Manhattan, with its spectacular cluster of big buildings and bright lights, has a magical aura. It is the focal point of every New Yorker's primal dream. This dream unfolds itself like a giant panorama. The picture's foreground is the dreamer's neighborhood. This is usually across the water (where four-fifths of the city's population comes from), but it could just as well be on the Lower East Side or in Hell's Kitchen or Little Italy or Chinatown or Harlem. In the dream, our eyes reach longingly over our tenement or brownstone or rowhouse roofs, and the smooth roofline (most New York neighborhoods have uniform rooflines) looks like a road.

Over the roofs, over the water, at the picture's center, our eyes meet the prize: Manhattan's skyscrapers and skyline, bathed in sunshine or radiating electricity and neon light. The big buildings are framed by an infinite day or night or twilight sky, which gives the picture a vanishing point and embeds the dream in the cosmos. This cityscape has the *chutzpah* of the biblical dream of Babel: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens." As it reaches for the sky, this complex of buildings beckons us to a life of passionate striving, feverish intensity, and expressive fullness, and it seems to deny that there are any limits on what human beings can do. (In Genesis 11, God worries about this: if people can build and maintain such a city, then "nothing will be restrained from them, that they imagine to do....") Can it be real? Can it be as close as it looks—we could almost reach out and touch it—or is it, like Kafka's Castle, some sort of existential trap or mirage? Can we get there on the subway? Can we stay? If we go, can we come back? And if we do make the leap, if we make a life inside those buildings, if we make ourselves into authentic New Yorkers, what will it do to us as human beings? For more than a century, these have been New York's overwhelming questions. The most luminous visions of New York are views from the bridge.

In the 1950s, when I was growing up in the Bronx, the act of crossing over into Manhattan seemed like a smooth and easy flow both ways. When our relatives from Brooklyn went to a Broadway theater or Madison Square Garden, they would say they were going to "the city"; but for us, going to those same places, even to meet them there, was going "downtown": we took it for granted that we and Manhattan's wonders were part of the same town. But in the 1970s and 1980s, the Bronx's view from the bridge was radically impaired. Imagine yourself dropped into the Bronx

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around 1981, enjoying the familiar view downtown. You will spot the difference right away: the foreground is broken. Now many tenements and apartment houses are cracked, burnt, split apart, caved in. Whole blocks have vanished or disintegrated into wreckage and debris. On other blocks, only a single house is left, with rubble all around; the building may well be far more striking, now that it is all alone, and if you examine its curves and details, you can often see that once, maybe not long ago, this sole survivor was quite grand. Some apartment houses are split by their courtyards (the Bronx was once known for its splendid courtyards), lived-in on one side, burnt-out on the other. Some blocks that not long ago were claustrophobic, perpetually shadowed, packed too tight with people, are sun-drenched now, wide open and empty as deserts. Sometimes there is a whole new zone, kind of a fore-foreground, that stands between you and the buildings: a blanket of cracked and burnt brick and wood and stone and tile and marble and steel and fabric and paper and plastic, shards of thousands and thousands of lives. Maybe the city has sealed it off with a steel fence or maybe it is wide open and you are welcome to take whatever fragments you want. On the horizon, you can see that the towers of Manhattan's Oz are still there, as alluring as ever; but close to the ground, the Bronx's yellow brick roads have crumbled into craters and minefields.

In the late 1970s, the *New York Times* had a little box, on page two or three of the Local Section, that listed all the buildings burned or destroyed the previous day or night. People called it the Ruins Section, and I knew many people who, like me, read the Ruins Section first of all. It was uncanny how the ruins ran on, building after building, block after block, mile after mile. On Bronx walks I met people from camera crews, sometimes from the local news—working on the latest disaster—but also from Canada, England, Italy, Sweden; I missed the one from the USSR. The people most visible on the South Bronx streets were kids, and lots of those kids looked startlingly hungry—hungry like kids in turn-of-the-century photographs by Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, hungry like American kids weren't supposed to be any more. (I was teaching in Harlem, and the kids on the Harlem streets looked a lot better fed.) For several years, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, more than a thousand Bronx buildings each year were destroyed by fire. The Fire Department listed the great majority as "suspicious fires," which left behind traces of fire accelerants.

BUT THERE were even better accelerants at work in the social stereotyping process. "What's wrong with these people?" Howard Cosell barked on national television, during the 1976 World Series at Yankee Stadium, as the camera from the Goodyear Blimp showed a building on fire less than a mile from the field. Cosell asked, in a tone that supplied its own answer, "Don't these people have any self-respect?" What a relief it must have been to think of the fires as something "these people" were *doing to themselves:* then you wouldn't have to worry about whether the Bronx's troubles were somehow your troubles. One thing that gave this situation an especially sinister twist is how many Bronx people came

Rackstraw Downes, *The Cross Bronx Expressway with the Harlem River Drive and the Major Deegan Interchange,* 1983, oil on canvas, 18½" x 60". Collection of the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the U.S.

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to see themselves as "these people," how many victims of suspicious fires came to think of themselves as prime suspects. On the local news, you could see families weeping in front of their smoking buildings, and asking, "What did we do?" There were plenty of journalists and pseudo-social scientists (often subsidized by right-wing foundations) only too glad to tell them their character flaws. A surprising alliance of the Fire Department, the Mayor's Task Force Against Arson, the insurance companies, and the urban left (the *Village Voice, City Limits,* and so on) focused instead on the character of the South Bronx's landlords. Lloyd's of London was said to have lost $20 million in the 1970s on Bronx insurance pools. Early in the 1980s, insurance companies stopped paying claims on Bronx fires, and the burning of the Bronx came to an abrupt end.

During the troubles, the Bronx lost over three hundred thousand people, and the South Bronx plummeted past census tracts in backwoods Louisiana and Mississippi to become, so the media said—I haven't been able to document this, but it could be—the poorest congressional district in the country. For people who stayed, life was hard. In the course of the 1980s, as public services kept shrinking, with gang violence and AIDS killing the young, it would get even harder. But many people found it easier to protect themselves from the flames than from the carpet bombings of invective that blamed them for the ruin of their world. (Looking for a way to evoke the full horror of this process, in 1984 I invented a word, *urbicide*, the murder of a city. I thought this word would be my contribution to the American idiom, but although I've seen it used a couple of times, it hasn't really caught on. Yet it may, down the road, because urbicide keeps happening all over.)

When the Bronx, after decades of peaceful anonymity, finally made it into the mass media as a symbol of all that could go wrong in city life, it wasn't just the buildings in the Bronx that were breaking down: it felt like a rupture in both New York's everyday reality and its archetypal dream. Our neighborhoods, including the poorest ones—maybe especially the poorest ones—were supposed to be roads and bridges leading to the city's heights. They were supposed to fuse their kids' energy and desire with the city's primal sources of energy downtown. And, to an amazing extent, they really did. For generations, they held the city together, gave it much of its distinctive flavor, and produced millions of authentic New Yorkers—wise guys and sophisticates, close to the streets but also to a global culture. What would be the wider ripples of neighborhood collapse? It was to dread.

IMAGES CHANGE their meanings over time. The first time you see a landscape of ruins, it is terrifying but magnificent, sublime. But when you see it day after day, year after year, it gets to be a drag. Was it really true that nothing could be done? The persistence of the ruins became embarrassing to public officials, and their embarrassment produced unconscious comedy. Stanley Simon, Bronx Borough President during the worst troubles, proposed covering the miles of broken buildings along the Cross-Bronx Expressway with decals that portrayed curtains, plants, and peaceful domestic scenes. Alas, even expensive decals still looked like cartoons; the Carter Community Employment and Training Act program, which could have paid unemployed artists to camouflage broken buildings, expired under Reagan; and Bronx graffitists, violently banned from the subways, found a new life covering broken buildings with enormous inscriptions: "This is a decal," "This is a fake," "This is a ruin." Then Simon went to prison for bribery and extortion, and people laughed about the politician's new clothes, and wondered what his decals would cover now.

But the Bronx did not have to hide its light under a decal. Even in its greatest misery and anguish—and in some sense, I think, *because of* its misery and anguish—the Bronx became more culturally creative than it had ever been in its life. As a Bronx character in Grace Paley's short story "Somewhere Else" put it, "The block is burning down on one side of the street, and the kids are trying to build something on the other." In the midst of dying, it was busy being born.

Anyone coming to New York for the first time in the 1970s, or returning here, had to be struck by thousands of subway cars satu-

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rated with luminous primary colors. The first wave of graffitists were at work, coming from all over the city, but from the Bronx most of all. These kids, mostly (though not entirely) black and Latin and male, were denounced and repeatedly arrested, but in the course of the 1970s their work developed a bold and adventurous visual language. They infused a drab and dilapidated transit system with adventurous graphics and youthful exuberance. Some of them showed obvious artistic talents—Revolt, Futura 2000, Daze, Crash, Sonic, Phase II, the United Artists, Fab Five Freddie, Dondi, who died this past April, and others I've long forgotten. They differed in aesthetics and sensibility: some playful and nonchalant, others existentially desperate; some projecting spontaneous overflows of powerful feeling, others tending toward elaborate patterns of design; some emphasizing pure visuals, others blending images with texts (IF ART IS A CRIME, MAY GOD FORGIVE ME); some conveying instant entertainment, usually through parodies of Disney or Warner Brothers cartoons, others more ruminative, abstract, even hieroglyphic; some addressing their audience with respect and esteem, others driven by an in-your-face punk disdain. My favorite was Lee Quinones, whose murals fused surreal landscapes with provocative texts: STOP THE BOMB, WAR IS SELFISH DEATH, MAN IS ALMOST EXTINCT. Lee was one of many who liked to incorporate "views from the bridge" in their murals, thus carrying on a dialogue and interplay between uptown and downtown. This interplay is the subject of the movie *Wild Style,* where Lee is a star.

Some of these kids developed careers as designers; some wound up with MTV; some went to Hollywood. Looking at their life stories, we can see their graffiti years as first steps up a ladder, and admire their resourcefulness in finding markets for themselves. But when the graffitists of the Bronx began, they had more than self-marketing in mind: they saw themselves as *citizens,* and insisted on the civic and public meaning of their work. Their shared desire to communicate with a large public all around the town, and beyond it, set the stage for a brutal, grueling, vastly expensive, materially and humanly destructive conflict with the arrogant and unresponsive bureaucracy of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). In 1980, in the midst of this conflict, Daze said:

> If the MTA really understood graffiti, they would know it's one of the best things subways have going for them. If the city would back us up and treat us as artists instead of vandals, we could contribute a lot to the beauty of New York.

"If the MTA really understood. . . ." But Daze, who had worked with the relatively sympathetic school and park bureaucracies, must have known what an implacable fortress he faced in the MTA. Later on, when he and other graffitists got a chance to make money, they took it and ran. In the commercial sector, some did very well. But it's important to recall that behind the private success there was a public failure. And it wasn't the kids who failed.

Alongside these graffitists, sometimes the same people, were the Bronx rappers. In the poorest congressional district in the United States, rap was an exemplary *musica povera.* Some early rappers came from musically sophisticated families, with strong backgrounds in jazz and R&B. Others had grown up too poor to take music lessons or have their own instruments, but had strong feeling for rhythm, powerful voices, and sharp wits. In the late 1970s, at the City College of New York (CCNY), where I taught, up in Harlem, every Thursday during Club Hour, somebody brought out turntables, and a DJ scratched and collaged dozens of records together, while kids in the audience took turns playing MC, rapping over an open mike. I was delighted: what it meant for me was the power of the *word,* which was what I'd been trying to teach all along. At the end of the 1970s, wherever blacks lived, rap was busting out all over, but a concentration of the first great DJs came from the Bronx—Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash—and they vied with each other, in dozens of small Bronx clubs, parks, and school auditoriums, with thousands of participant young listeners, to create a distinctive rap sound of samples, beats and rhymes.

The spirit of early raps tended toward dancehall and party music, with funny, shal-

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low lyrics like these from "Live Connection '82," by The Grand Wizard Theodore: "The people in the back, you ain't the wack/The people in the middle, let me see you wiggle/ Young lady in the blue, I'm talking to you/but don't you stop that body rock." But rap's first great hit, when it finally came, was heavy, dark, and deep. This was "The Message," by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, released by Sugar Hill in the Reagan summer of 1982. "The Message" showed that there was not only a national but an international audience for rap.

In "The Message," Mellie Mel chants in a rich and intensely dramatic voice:

> Don't push me, 'cause
> I'm close to the edge,
> trying not to lose my head. *Hah!*
>
> It's like a jungle sometimes
> it makes me wonder
> how I keep from going under.
> *(Huhh huh huh Huhh)*

Mellie Mel then takes us on a Bronx neighborhood tour: Broken glass everywhere, people pissing on the streets like they just don't care; the narrator can't stand the pain, can't stand the noise, but "got no money in my pocket, so I got no choice." Myriad horrors are compressed into a couple of minutes. Rats in the rooms; junkies in the alley with baseball bats; predatory repo men; nice girls turned into addicts and whores; kids, cynical before the age of ten, who want to grow up to be drug dealers because those are the only people they know who command respect; their big brothers, who go from unemployed to killers to dead. The rapper addresses a handsome corpse, asks him how he could be so dumb: "you lived so fast and died so young."

This rapper's attitudes here are complex and hard to keep in any sort of emotional balance. He insists on the self-destructive idiocy of the people in the slum he lives in, but also on their human dignity. He, too, asks, "What's wrong with these people?" But he doesn't settle for any cliché answer—not even the answer that they are victims, though he makes it clear that they are. Moreover, his voice reveals that he sees himself as one of "these people": the story is about "us," not "them." This complex of feelings forces him to walk a thin line. His refrain warns us, "So don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/Trying not to lose my head." Then, once more, the concrete jungle. Then, by surprise, a burst of wishful thinking. He identifies with two people maimed by violence who get help and somehow survive the violence:

> They pushed a girl in front of a train,
> Took her to the doctor, sewed her arm on again.
> Stabbed that man right through the heart,
> Gave him a transplant and a brand new start.

Then the chorus again. Then a collage of street sounds, culminating in a police siren, a (black) voice ordering everyone to freeze, motors taking them all away. In the end the street is empty, the rap and the rapper both disappear, only the beat goes on.

"The Message" became an instant classic, endlessly quoted, parodied, and sampled. And it made a breakthrough for the whole genre: suddenly, all over America, South as well as North, and all over Europe as well, there were a lot of people out there who wanted to listen to rap. What was "the message"? Maybe, *We can be home in the middle of the end of the world.* Or maybe, *We come from ruins, but we are not ruined.* The metamessage is something like this: not only social disintegration, but even existential desperation, can be sources of life and creative energy. Even as the fires and violence were wrecking the Bronx's old roads downtown, a great outpouring of cultural energy was forging new connections with downtown. The capacity for soul-making in the throes of suffering lit up the Bronx with an aura all its own.

TURN NOW to the visual art that was made by people from downtown who came uptown, who worked and sometimes lived in the South Bronx in its fire years, and whose work was shaped by being there. These men and women worked in very different styles, with radically different (and sometimes

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inwardly contradictory) imaginative visions, but there are human contexts they had in common. They all were (and still are) part of the sixties generation: they grew up, and defined themselves as artists, during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. That history filled them with a high seriousness and a sense of human urgency. When they came to define themselves as artists, they were all committed to making art that would *mean* something. But, in their connection to New York's downtown art scene, they were also products of a radically skeptical modernist culture that put all traditional and conventional meanings in doubt, so that, circa 1970, although they wanted to mean something, the meaning of "meaning" was not at all clear. Another theme they all absorbed from modernism was the idea that authentic art could be created only by *experiment,* constant experimentation not only on raw material (paint, canvas, plaster, bronze, paper, wood, steel, plastic, and so on), but on the artist himself, on his or her whole being.

Modern history is full of people, and groups of people, trying to find truth and meaning by going to places where life is a lot harder and more dangerous than the life they live, and trying to connect with the people who live there. These enterprises include Christian missionaries in Africa, China, and all over the world; Russian intellectuals in the 1870s, "going to the people"; Gauguin going to Tahiti, and Van Gogh going to peasant sharecroppers and coal miners; the whole anthropology profession, from its beginnings in remote islands and valleys to its current embrace of inner-city neighborhoods; American civil rights workers of the 1960s, going from the North to the South; but also, in the news every day for years, the American armed forces going to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people, and destroying their villages in order to save them. Artists working in the Bronx were aware of these very mixed examples, recognized the potential for exploitation—as in, "Take me to the burning buildings! I want a lover from the ruins"—and hoped that endless self-criticism could help them avoid it. (But sometimes the self-criticism was so corrosive as to bring on paralysis.) They were united by empathy for people who, as "The Message" said, were living "close to the edge." They felt they were different from, and better than, missionaries or imperial troops, in that they were not trying to enforce a system of meanings whose truth was pre-established, but rather to work with the people of the Bronx to create new meanings that could light up the whole world. And, although different artists responded differently to graffiti and rap, they all felt inspired to be working with a generation of kids who not only knew how to be active and creative in the midst of great pain, but knew how to be citizens, seeking a public meaning for their lives. They all hoped to learn something from the people they encountered, and also to give something back.

THIS WAS the context in which Stephen Eins, an artist from Vienna, established Fashion Moda, a gallery and "alternate space" in a storefront on Third Avenue, just below "the Hub" of 149th Street in the South Bronx. For a decade or more, Fashion Moda brought "downtown" artists, musicians, and writers together with "uptown" graffiti painters, rappers, breakdance crews, and curious neighborhood people. (Sculptor Rigoberto Torres is the most important artist who found his calling by walking off the street and into Fashion Moda out of sheer curiosity.) Eins was immensely resourceful at working various government bureaucracies and helping artists get space to mount innovative installations in schools and parks, in abandoned apartment buildings (there were so many), and on the streets.

One Fashion Moda artist, John Fekner, used the walls of abandoned apartment houses to create what in effect were giant billboards, with captions like BROKEN PROMISES and LAST HOPE. Fekner's billboards often dominated their environments, and provided ironic commentary on some of the photo ops that various politicians grasped in front of the ruins. Jimmy Carter was there in 1976, appeared moved, and promised to rebuild the South Bronx—only, as with many Carter initiatives, it wasn't supposed to cost the federal government an extra dime. His plan turned out to be that, for several years, all of the city's share of federal community development money

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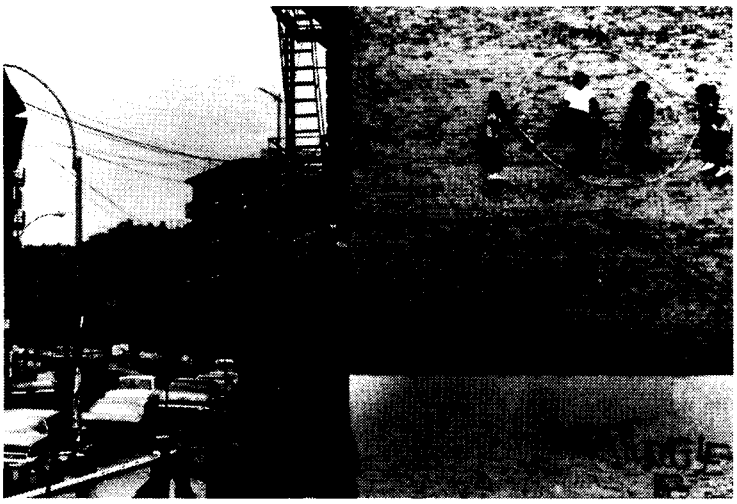

John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, *Double Dutch,* 1981-82. Photo: Martha Cooper

would be channeled here, while other city neighborhoods would get nothing at all. When City Council representatives of those other neighborhoods protested, Carter's aides said, in effect, "What's wrong with these people?" and were glad to wash their hands of the promise.

David Finn's work featured life-size figures sculpted out of garbage bags, old newspapers, and street debris, arranged and displayed provocatively in buildings or on streets, in ways that suggested political prisoners (the South Bronx was full of Latin Americans and Africans who could tell stories), massacred victims of the drug gang wars (there were plenty), or (this was the kids' favorite idea) space invaders. Finn's work was visually striking and beautifully realized: it evoked Picasso in his African mask and his "Guernica" periods. Like much exciting public art in the Bronx (and everywhere else), it elicited enthusiastic support from children and anger from many of their parents.

Many outstanding photographers appeared in the Bronx in the 1970s and 1980s, not only documenting the horrors, but portraying powerful visions of the human condition, and putting together impressive bodies of work. The two I know best are Mel Rosenthal and Camilo José Vergara. Both of them have done serious work outside New York—Rosenthal in Puerto Rico and Central America and Vergara in Detroit and Los Angeles—but it was in the South Bronx that they came into their own. Rosenthal works in the tradition of humanist snapshots developed by Europeans like Henri Cartier-Bresson, and by great war photographers like Robert Capa. An archetypal Mel Rosenthal shot is kids playing in broken buildings, or families passing by the ruins, or the last old man or woman (whose face looks centuries old) in a building that looks about to collapse, or looks like it already has collapsed. These children won't be robbed of their childhood: they don't stop playing just because their playground has been destroyed. Women dance in the street, and don't stop dancing just because there's no more street. His people use the rubble as sites for new dances and new games. Rosenthal understands how people can make themselves at home in negative spaces; they are not only survivors but pioneers.

Vergara feels a special empathy for architecture, for buildings. He especially loves the aspiration toward Renaissance and Baroque grandeur that makes Bronx apartment houses so special. He grasps one of the glories of the Bronx, for which it will go down in history: its ability to deliver real grandeur to the working classes. His serial photographs of buildings in the 1970s and 1980s dramatize, year by year, the disintegration of that glory. Because he really feels it, and makes us feel it, the process of its destruction is so heartrending. A few years ago, he displayed one of his grandest series: the gradual disintegration of an apartment house on Vyse Avenue into nothingness. It was a magnificent spectacle, but, I felt, somehow too cruel: the destructive process seemed too much like cosmic entropy. (In Rosenthal's photos it looks more like heavy artillery.) Vergara said Wait, the story wasn't over, he was sure he would be back. Indeed, his recent work shows Vyse Avenue inhabited again. The building is on a smaller scale, two-

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story row houses, as against yesterday's vanished palaces. But now there is a new trajectory, going upward after decades of coming down. It is as if the people of the Bronx have begun building the Tower of Babel again, reaching for Vergara's luminescent blue sky.

ONE OF THE most striking art initiatives in the recent Bronx has been Tim Rollins's studio, which he named "K.O.S.," Kids Of Survival. Rollins began in 1981 as an art teacher in Junior High School 52, working with about forty early-teenagers who were classified as learning disabled and at risk of dropping out. His work with these kids and his emerging love for them crystallized into a distinctive sort of art workshop. Rollins worked the system to develop a splendid art library and art studio, where kids could learn and experiment with every material and style. Then he read to his kids: some books that were in the curriculum, others that were modernist masterpieces. They would discuss the books together, and try to imagine how they might be represented. I visited some of these classes on Longwood Avenue a decade ago, and I don't know what his kids' standard reading test scores were, but I can testify that they were *there*. They gradually developed a signature form, the literary mural. The mural's background was always a reproduction of the text; the foreground, exquisite variations on the common theme. For *Scarlet Letter,* it was variations on the red letter "A"; for Franz Kafka's *Amerika,* it was variations on a golden horn. Doing *Amerika* together at once bonded and inspired them. In a short time, working fervidly, they created a number of gorgeous and inspiring horn murals.

And suddenly, the whole world wanted them: colleges wanted K.O.S. to give a workshop; towns all over America and in Europe wanted horn murals for their Town Halls; Charles Saatchi and Mary Boone wanted all the work they could get; suddenly the kids were bigshots in Soho and all over town; *New York* magazine did a headline piece that suggested Rollins was exploiting the kids' native genius, and they should go solo and become superstars. (The *vita* of Jean-Michel Basquiat, who could have been a character in "The Message"—an art star before he was twenty-five, dead from a drug overdose before he was thirty—must have cast a long shadow in these kids' lives.) Many of these kids had hardly been out of the Bronx in their lives, and they weren't ready for celebrity. For that matter, Rollins himself, who had been out of the Bronx plenty—he had grown up in Maine, graduated from the School of Visual Arts, worked for Joseph Kossuth—wasn't ready for it either. (Is any of us ready for fifteen minutes of American fame?) Some of the kids went on to art schools and began artistic careers, and even those who didn't stay with art learned some things about life that have surely helped them grow up. But the company imploded. Rollins is a great teacher of the wonder of art and the discipline of art; he lacks the inner cynicism to be a guide through the circus of art. K.O.S. was a splendid fusion of uptown and downtown, and it was sad to see it mangled by its own success. But Rollins says reports of its death are exaggerated: he is still there on Longwood Avenue, the workshop is still open, they are still doing murals all over the country, his senior class had 100 percent college acceptance last year. K.O.S. lives.

Another brilliant initiative, with a more tragic *dénouement,* was launched by the painter John Ahearn. Ahearn is a native of Binghamton, a graduate of Cornell; his twin brother is the filmmaker Charlie Ahearn, director of *Wild Style.* John has gone farther than any downtown artist I know in "going to the people": he didn't just work in the South Bronx, but lived in it, all through the 1980s and into the 1990s; like virtually everybody there, he became the victim of both random and intentional violence. Around 1980, he moved from downtown Manhattan to Walton Avenue near 171st Street, a dilapidated but lively neighborhood about a mile from Yankee Stadium. There he began to work with Walton Avenue native Rigoberto (Robert) Torres.

Together they developed what became a signature style. First they would take polaroid photos of people, to fix the details of what their subjects looked like. Then, after placing their subject on a pallet, they would pile on layer after layer of plaster, while the model breathed through a straw and prayed that it wouldn't break. (It never did.) From the cast they would

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make a bust or full-body sculpture, which one of them would paint. There are differences in their styles: Torres's faces are more monochromatic, Ahearn's more layered; Torres's faces suggest folk art, and (like much modern art) seem to want to look more primitive than they are; Ahearn's faces seem to want to look more archaic than they are (also a great tradition in modern art), time-travelling toward the Christian anguish of Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Van Gogh. In some ways their work evokes the Mexican muralists of the 1920s and 1930s, but the murals and frescoes of Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and others tend toward aggressive flatness, while Ahearn's and Torres's works are especially striking in their exploration of depth. Together they cast and painted hundreds of figures, mostly neighborhood people, individually and in groups, posing or hanging out, talking or kissing, and many environmental friezes that adorn South Bronx walls. Among the most famous and most beautiful are *Double Dutch*, *Back to School*, and *We Are Family*. (Full disclosure: They also did me, while they were in residence at CCNY's art department in 1985. I'm part of a frieze of *CCNY People*, painted by Torres, mounted above the entrance to the college cafeteria. On bad days I go and look at my effigy, and feel better.)

The catalogue of their 1991 Houston-Cincinnati-Honolulu show, entitled *South Bronx Hall of Fame,* contains many photographs of Ahearn and Torres working out on the street, in a festival atmosphere, caught up in creative rapture, at home at last. It's as if Ahearn is telling us, "Behold! I went to the people, and it worked." Look at the pieces, and the pictures, and you can see that, at least for a while, it did. Some of the images suggest even more: there is a series of photos of a multiple casting of what looks like a Walton Avenue block party on a lovely summer day in 1985. Look at the faces in the crowd, yearning to be cast or just marveling at the work, and you could almost be in a Renaissance painting or a movie scene where Jesus performs a miracle. Water into wine? Or maybe loaves and fishes: the power of art creates enough for all.

In 1986, Ahearn, here working without Torres, won a city competition for bronze sculptures to adorn a plaza in front of a new Police Station, under the Jerome Avenue el (the IRT Number 4), a couple of blocks from where he lived. The figures he chose for this plaza, all neighborhood people he knew, were named Corey, Raymond, and Daleesha: Corey with a boom box and a basketball (he was configured as a homage to Radio Raheem in Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing;* he may have configured himself this way), Raymond kneeling with his pit bull, and Daleesha on her roller skates. The ensuing debacle has been vividly described by Jane Kramer in her 1994 book *Whose Art is It?* Ahearn didn't seem to realize that some people wouldn't want statues of Corey, Raymond, and Daleesha around because they didn't like *them*. Alcina Salgado, a retired housekeeper who agitated against his work, described Ahearn's subjects as "roof people." She offered an arch definition: "There are people who go to school and people who go to work, and then there are the people we find on the roof."

Meanwhile, other people surfaced within the city bureaucracy who had nothing to do with the neighborhood, but who attacked Ahearn for having politically incorrect skin. Arthur Symes, an assistant commissioner in the Department of Cultural Affairs, delivered this verdict: "He's not of the community because he's not black—it's simply that." On September 25, 1991, the bronze figures were installed. Salgado, along with her daughter (B.A., Sarah Lawrence), stood on the plaza and denounced Ahearn, his models, and his art. In Kramer's reconstruction of the day, Ahearn tried to engage them in dialogue, but the more he tried to talk, the more angrily they condemned him. Meanwhile, none of "the people" from his block stepped up to help him. (On the other hand, he didn't make any moves to mobilize defenders, though the South Bronx always was and still is full of them.) What seems to have happened next is that Ahearn decided that if "the people" could be so mad at him, then he was failing to communicate, and he must be in the wrong. He paid to have the statues taken down, and soon after he left the Bronx. Seven years later, the large pedestals are still empty.

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Ahearn himself seems to have lived through this affair by framing it in starkly Christian terms: suffering, trial, ordeal, sacrifice. As he told the story to me on the phone in the early 1990s, this is the way he saw it: He believed that anyone who truly loved "the people" had to be prepared to give up everything else. His burden, but also his call, was to sacrifice something he loved nearly as much as he loved the people: his art. Now John has paid plenty of dues, and if a belief in the holiness of sacrifice helped him get over, then anybody who cares about him has to be glad. But anybody who cares about the Bronx has to see that a sacrifice of noble and dedicated people and their work is the last thing the Bronx needs.

ONE THING that magnifies the trouble here is misunderstanding of some big ideas: "the people," "the community." In many versions of this story, including Ahearn's own, there's a slippage between "people" and "*the* people." If even a few people are mad at Ahearn—and there's no evidence it was ever more than a few—he blames himself for trampling on a whole community. But this vision of the people's wholeness has more to do with mythology than with demography. In fact, like every modern city, the South Bronx is deeply divided within itself. In cities that have become poor and broken by urbicide, the divisions have become radical polarizations. When Salgado offers an instant analysis of the class structure that cleaves the South Bronx in two—"the people who go to school and the people who go to work" *versus* "the people you find on the roof"—this grim dualism rings true. You can see, from both his friezes and his Walton Avenue photos, how much John Ahearn loves the street and the people who spend much of their lives on it. So do I, and it's right to celebrate the modern city street as a primary source of creativity. But it's also true that cities today are full of people like the Salgados, who feel it's a matter of life and death to protect their children *from* the street—and they're right, too.

Another important fact of life that this sad affair reveals is the culture war among American blacks. John hoped to strike a friendly chord by casting Corey, the wannabee Raheem. He didn't grasp how terrifying a presence this large street person is to the people who live on Spike Lee's street. Arthur Symes may be able to help us see this. Symes, remember, was the black bureaucrat unearthed by Kramer who said John was the wrong man because he had the wrong color skin. But Kramer finds something else he says (she cites it on the same page) that may be more relevant here: "He saw John's pieces as monuments to everything he'd been trying to save his community from...." Nobody seems to have asked Alcina Salgado her opinion of the rap music that would be the most likely sound to come out of Corey's boom box (as it came out of Radio Raheem's); but we can be pretty sure what that opinion would be. Spike Lee cuts corners a little when he has Raheem's boom box smashed by the one white man on his block; on any real block he would find plenty of black volunteers. For many black Americans, especially (though not only) kids, rap, and the street life that rap celebrates, is part of the solution; but for many others, especially their parents, it is part of the problem.

I've described this tragic conflict as a Bronx problem, a black problem, an art problem. But it's really a human problem. Are there any artists out there who can embrace both Corey-Raymond-Daleesha *and* the Salgados? Are there any *people* out there with the largeness of vision and spiritual depth to embrace them all? That would mean embracing not only the work-and-school people, and the street-and-roof people, but also the art people who try to embrace them both. Now, everybody loves Shakespeare, even four hundred years later, because we know he loved them all. After that, it's a pretty short list. (Should Jesus be on it? Karl Marx? Martin Luther King, Jr.? We could have interesting discussions about this, in the Bronx or in Manhattan.) Can we live in, can we even imagine, a city that includes them all? You can't hurry love, no, you just have to wait. But it helps if you have an idea of what you are waiting for.

If you walk or drive around the Bronx today, after a few years of being away, it looks like miracle or magic; if you didn't recognize streets and buildings, you could almost feel you were on a different planet. Many blocks

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are still empty and fenced off, but that expressionist dreamscape, those jagged haunting forms of ruins, are nearly gone. On block after block of the South Bronx, it is clear that Mayor Ed Koch's five-billion-dollar, ten-year plan for housing rehabilitation has been a tremendous success. (It is strange that Koch, so often a boastful man, never boasts about his housing rehabs. Has he moved so far to the right that he is embarrassed to be identified with the lives of the poor? Whatever the reason, these thousands of effective rehabs are his greatest political accomplishment, and he deserves credit, whether he wants it or not.)

The rebuilding of the Bronx has been incremental, but enormous. This overall feeling seems to be confirmed in sharply diminished crime—even those who are reluctant to admit that anything has changed finally concede that a lot fewer kids are shooting each other—and in improved public health and AIDS statistics. Political boss Raymond Velez is still bleeding the Bronx from his ever-thriving Hunts Point Multi-Service Center, just off Westchester Avenue; but, no thanks to him and his friends, the Bronx today seems to have a lot more blood than it did. Compared with the radical dualism that haunted Alcina Salgado, there seems to be a far more complex and highly differentiated social structure in place today. Almost insensibly, in barely a decade, the South Bronx has gone through a great leap, from apocalyptic horror to ordinary city life. There are no monuments of transformation; but after the nightmarish monumentality of the ruins, the absence of monuments may be a relief. Two of the short stories in "The Message"—the girl pushed in front of the train, the man stabbed through the heart—turn out, a decade later, to be stories of the Bronx itself. Like them, it has got "a brand new start," and it isn't so close to the edge anymore.

As the twentieth century ends, it looks like the South Bronx's seasons in hell are over. (We can't say for sure, but that's how it looks now.) Ironically, as the fires have abated, and the ruins have been rebuilt, it has become a less compelling subject for art. It isn't in the news very much. It doesn't signify the way it used to. You could say the Bronx has lost its aura. Should we be sad? I don't think so. For years, the Bronx existed in an urbicidal hell, over the edge. Art and artists were among the forces that helped it up, and helped it get back into the flow of normal, ambiguous modern life. A great burst of creativity emerged from the Bronx's ruins, and it deserves remembrance and celebration.

WHAT ART IS being created in the Bronx today? I can't say very well. It's hard to see, it's not on the street, it's not in your face. But don't doubt it's there. Although plenty of terrific art springs from desperation, I think most great art grows out of normal life. As the Bronx starts a new millennium, it will have a chance to nourish less desperate modes of creativity, and we can look forward to celebrating those.

Meanwhile, we can think about the Tower of Babel again. In Genesis 11, God is frightened by people's powers, and undertakes to "confuse their language" so they won't be able to understand each other. Devoid of mutual understanding, they fight, the Tower crashes into ruins, and they "scatter . . . over the face of all the earth." But now, in the great cities of the modern world, they have come together again. What would happen if all the peoples who make up a modern city could understand each other? Then maybe, as God said, "nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." Would it be the Garden City of Eden? That was how some people imagined the Bronx a hundred years ago. The urbicidal ruins that came to afflict American cities, the Bronx worst of all, felt like a savage destruction of that dream. And yet, its city of ruins turned out to be a place where, thanks to art, people coming from very different places started to talk together and work together and recognize each other in ways people had never quite done before. It will be a time before they can do all they imagine. But the power to imagine was itself an achievement. The ruins of the Bronx became a place where people could imagine modern life together afresh. We have to remember to celebrate that. ●

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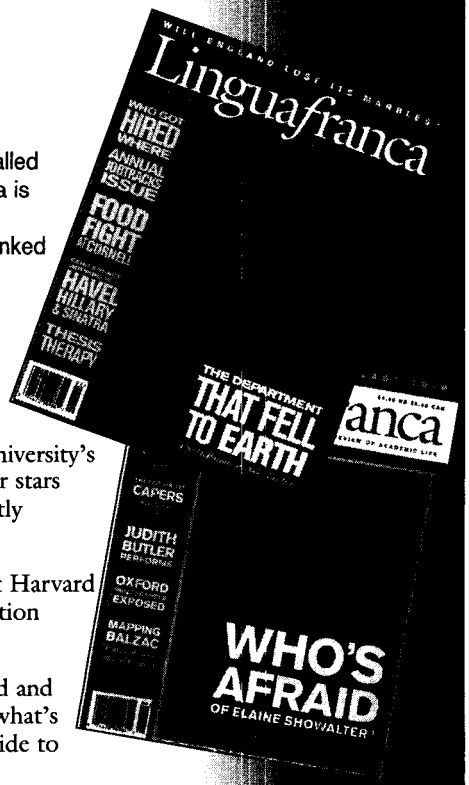

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Should Opera Be Subsidized?

Bruce Ackerman

Begin by considering a thing of indisputable beauty and spiritual depth: the High Mass of the Roman Catholic Church. Does its obvious grandeur mean that the state should subsidize its performance?

For those who say yes, the case for a subsidy to the opera may seem straightforward, almost inevitable: if it is appropriate to subsidize the Mass, why not *The Magic Flute* or *Fidelio*?

But for liberals like myself, the case for state-supported opera is more complicated. Whatever else liberalism may be about, it has always stood for the separation of church and state. Given this commitment, subsidy for the opera raises an obvious question: If liberals are opposed to the establishment of religion, how can they justify supporting the establishment of one of the great totems of secular humanism—the operas of Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, and other lesser saints in the secular canon?

This question reveals a split within the liberal tradition. On the one hand, there is the aggressive anticlericalism of the French Enlightenment, best represented by the cultural policies of the French Republic since 1870. On this militant view, there is an easy distinction between the Catholic Mass and *The Magic Flute*. The Mass seeks to sustain the future of an illusion, in Freud's famous phrase, while *The Magic Flute* is a triumphant demonstration of the spiritual grandeur of the modern spirit. What, then, could be a more suitable task for militant liberalism than to subsidize the latter, while denying funds to the former?

We can begin to see why heavy subsidies for the opera seem so uncontroversial in Europe. Not only are they rooted in a rich tradition of royal and princely patronage, but they command broad ideological support in these more liberal, democratic days. On the right, civilized religionists support the opera to demonstrate a broad-minded concern with subsidizing all the great achievements of European civilization, not merely the sectarian ones. On the left, civilized Jacobins support the opera as one of the ways of conducting Voltaire's war against the church by other means. Although militant liberals may no longer wish literally to *ecraser l'infame*, they may hope to seduce her devotees by an ongoing celebration of the glories of the humanist spirit.

But there is another liberalism, which Americans like myself have been defending recently. This liberalism aims for a more thoroughgoing kind of disestablishment between the state and a specially privileged culture—whether it be defined by the texts and celebrations of the Roman or secular canon. As much as possible, the liberal state should be neutral on such matters, leaving it to each citizen freely to determine whether he or she should give financial support to the Church of Rome or the one at Bayreuth. In contrast to the militant secularism of the French tradition, the neutralist spirit of modern American liberalism strives to prevent either side in the ongoing culture war from using the state's coercive powers of taxation as a weapon in the struggle for our souls.

In advocating this wider ranging disestablishment of both religious and secular orthodoxies, I do not wish to trivialize the ultimate importance of their ongoing contest over the meaning of life. To the contrary, it is precisely because of the importance of this great debate that the state should strive to be neutral in the contest. After all, if the state self-consciously, and ostentatiously, takes sides

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in this conversation, it cannot avoid denigrating the ultimate convictions of many of its dissenting citizens. If, for example, a devout religionist protests the state sponsorship of the glorification of the Masonic order in *The Magic Flute*, how, precisely, are the partisans of state subsidy supposed to respond? Haven't they only changed establishments from the old days when it was the partisans of the Enlightenment who were protesting at the state-sponsored glorification of the Mass rather than of Mozart?

In raising this question, I do not wish to question the ultimate value of secular humanism. To the contrary, I am proud to cast my own lot with modernity, and believe that Freud was onto something very deep in his dismissive treatment of religion. But there is something to which I am even more committed—and that is opposition to the idea that the state should be in the business of saving souls by monumentalizing my own views of personal salvation in great granite monuments to high culture.

Because I love opera, this liberal rule of abstinence will deprive me of the joys of moral triumphalism on those happy occasions when I come out on top of the political circus. But even then, I will get something more precious out of a rigorous policy of state disestablishment—and that is the construction of a political system in which, as much as possible, no citizen disparages the ultimate convictions held by others. Although my religious fellow citizens may be making a profound blunder in perpetuating a metaphysical illusion, they are my fellow citizens nonetheless—and what profit is there in disparaging their conscientious convictions by subsidizing my creed while denying funds to theirs?

To be sure, I can imagine cases in which selective cultural subsidies may be justified without disparaging the equal standing of others. Consider, for example, the case of a subordinated minority, which has been condemned for generations to crushing injustice and cultural suppression. In such a case, there is everything to be said for a special state fund aimed at restoring grievously damaged cultural institutions. Rather than offending the equality of citizens, such a fund reaffirms this core commitment of the liberal state. Similarly, I can fully endorse a broad-ranging commitment to musical performance and appreciation as part of the state's program of liberal education.

But, to put it gently, neither of these rationales provides much support for subsidies to the grand opera houses of Europe and America. We are not dealing here with the Romany of Eastern Europe or even the French of Canada, but with an especially obvious case of gratuitous state establishment of a privileged culture—in several senses of the word. Most obviously, the people who go to the opera are, by and large, privileged. A generous state subsidy simply means that they have only to pay $20 or $75 a ticket, rather than $50 or $200. For many—perhaps most—of the ticketholders, the event is treated as a secularized religious rite. During a magical evening, they are reenacting a holy sacrament connecting them up with the privileged bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Paris or Vienna, establishing a mystical bond that transcends the mundanities of everyday life. This is, of course, why opera audiences are so remorselessly conservative—demanding, to the dismay of musical directors everywhere, the endless repetition of a ritual cycle of classics.

A few facts speak eloquently here: in 1911, the average age of an opera performed in German-speaking countries was 53 years; a half century later, in 1965, it was 108 years. At that time, the operas of Verdi were performed three times more frequently than the combined total contributed by the top ten "modern" composers of the twentieth century.* While the relentless monotony satisfies the ritualistic desire of the upper class to connect with the grand bourgeoisie of the past, it almost crushes the creative spirit of the artistic souls who are called upon to officiate at these rites.

Almost, but not quite. Hope springs eter-

*Bruno S. Frey and Werner W. Pommerehne, *Muses and Markets*, pp. 26-7 (1989). In 1965, the most "successful" modern opera was Orff's *Die Kluge*, which ranked forty-ninth in overall number of performances in 1965, followed by Gershwin's *Porgie and Bess* (fifty-ninth). These figures are limited to the German-speaking world, and I would be indebted to any reader for more comprehensive, and up-to-date, statistics.

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nal in the hearts of the grand impresarios—if the subsidies were only multiplied yet further, perhaps the artists might finally liberate themselves from their devout audiences and offer up the prospect of a great operatic renaissance!

But happily, our politics are sufficiently democratic to prevent quite this level of cultural establishment. We are fated instead to continue the ritual cycle of Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner endlessly—perhaps providing the artistic avant-garde with enough resources to shock the bourgeoisie with modernistic variations on the *Ring*, but never with enough resources to enable a truly vibrant and innovative culture. In short, our subsidies are creating the worst kind of state establishment—in which an increasingly closed canon is remorselessly repeated despite its increasing distance from the anxieties and ultimate concerns of most citizens.

But even if I were wrong about this, even if the liberal democratic state of the twenty-first century found its Mad Max of Bavaria, my objection in principle would remain: it is wrong for the state to glorify *any* totalizing creed, even my own. If this requires more spartan operatic performances, at higher prices, I accept this as one of the costs of life in a free society. The state should get out of the business of bribing its adult citizens to adopt an official version of high culture. ●

BRUCE ACKERMAN is professor of law and political science at Yale. He is the author, most recently, of *The Case Against Lameduck Impeachment* and co-author of *The Stakeholder Society.*

Operas and Citizens: Mitchell Cohen Responds

BRUCE ACKERMAN and I are both passionate about opera; we both have egalitarian commitments. We both, I suppose, are "secular humanists." We both would separate religion and state. And we diverge—markedly. Is it because Bruce Ackerman is a "liberal" and I am a "social democrat"? Only in part. These designations are not absolute nowadays. He is a liberal who is concerned for social justice; I am a social democrat who values liberal precepts. Still, I want to press distinctions because our disagreement is not solely about access to culture; it is also about how to conceive the relations of individuals to society. Ackerman has a certain "liberal" notion of those relations, and this underlies his opposition to public subsidy of opera; my argument is inevitably with this notion. So it is as a social democrat—as someone committed to an "equality-friendly" society—that I would justify the principle of public subsidy of the most "elite" domain of culture.

Ackerman's argument, in brief, is twofold: (1) secular culture and state should be as separate as religion and state; (2) public patronage of opera is a species of elite enrichment that, ironically, impoverishes this art form. The first claim assumes that secular culture and religion are to be regarded as equivalent, at least as concerns politics. Some readers may be surprised to find a liberal allowing this because "secular humanism" is usually censured by the most illiberal elements in Western societies. (They tend to caricature it as a belief in human omnipotence.) The grievance, of course, is not novel; for centuries "traditionalists" have spoken this language when challenged by liberal ideas. In the late twentieth century, the protest is against post-1960s "moral breakdown."

This is obviously not Ackerman's complaint, yet it seems to me that his liberal response to illiberalism must, finally, imperil his own values. What distinguishes liberalism, according to Ackerman, is its insistence on the right of citizens "to live their own lives in their own way." (I quote now—as I will at various points—from his 1994 article on "Political Liberalisms," which summarizes many of the assumptions of his brief on opera). But it is just this right that contemporary foes of secular humanism mean to frustrate. They know that denouncing "individualism" or "free choice" won't get far—not in America, anyway—so other, cultural, means are deployed to their conservative ends. This is not to deny

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True Belief as an animating force, certainly not for the likes of Jerry Falwell. It is a somewhat different matter when neoconservative Irving Kristol, devotee of fundamentalist strength within the Republican Party, is asked if it is legitimate for nonbelieving intellectuals to commend religion to others, and answers (as he has): "yes." I am a secular being, but I can imagine the offense a religious person might take at such utilitarianism. I also wonder if likening High Mass to a "performance" of secular art, as Ackerman does in the name of liberal "neutrality," might be found distasteful. Moreover, he makes secular culture and religion both analogs and fungible. As the Mass is a "performance," so "artistic souls" "officiate" at an operatic "holy sacrament." Finance both or neither.

Ackerman contends—he follows philosopher John Rawls in this—that a liberal state cannot take sides in quarrels among "comprehensive" outlooks; it ought only to establish parameters or a consensus permitting differing "metaphysical" systems to coexist. This, however, is to interpret the culture wars in terms close to those deployed by the right—as a contest of "creeds," each of them "totalizing" in their espousal of an ultimate meaning of life, all of them deemed to be of the same order. If, however, they are not of the same order—if there are different ways of "totalizing" with different consequences—then his argument falters, especially if we recall that today's liberalism is itself a long-term outgrowth of secular humanism. A question inevitably arises: can a liberal state thrive if secular humanism does not have privileged status in the political (as well as more general) culture?

Ackerman thinks that culture and state must be separated in the name of liberalism, that political liberalism requires neutrality towards the cultural texture of society. I think it is secular culture and religion that ought to be demarcated, and here my argument will perhaps ruffle religious sensibilities: so far as I know there have been occasional fisticuffs over unorthodox productions in opera houses but no St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. I do not mean to tar all religious people as fanatics or reactionaries—that is plainly not so. But I do think that instead of distinguishing between French "militant" secularism and American "neutrality" as Ackerman does, we would do better to distinguish between those people (secular or religious) who digest well the history of religious civil wars, persecutions, and intolerance and those who admit, even for their own liberal reasons, what the religious right wants: to make secular humanism and faith into commensurate contestants in the public sphere.

Secular humanism (like opera) has Renaissance humanism as a progenitor. Many Renaissance humanists were religious, but their methods challenged the "totalizing" metaphysics of the Middle Ages and fostered intellectual pluralism. Turning to Greek and Roman authorities afforded alternatives to the One Authority of their times. This obliged humanists to evaluate, to think for themselves, to make choices—prerequisites for a liberal ethos. This is why I think, *pace* Ackerman, that secular humanism must be privileged for a liberal democracy (or my preferred social democracy) to flourish. It enables individuals to evaluate and to choose among various life options—secular, religious, or a mix. This is hardly so in societies under theological dominion.

Indeed, modern tolerance did not come about because churches reasoned together and concluded that all individuals have the right "to live their own lives in their own way." Tolerance was conceded by exhausted holy warriors after they failed to impose their creeds on each other in bloody civil wars. That concession generated a displacement of intolerant, religious public culture by a tolerant, more liberal one—a sorry development in the eyes of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim fundamentalists through today, but a happy one in mine. So I conclude that freedom of religion should be defended fiercely but religious categories should not comprise the substructure of all discourse: they should remain in their proper realm. I know that some religious people (not just fundamentalists) object to such delimitation. Frankly, that is just my point.

Now, I am also aware that a good deal of

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our culture has religious ancestry. But consider: the liberal democratic state descended from monarchical absolutism in Europe. The latter fashioned centralized administration over and political coherence within given territories. When liberal democracy displaced absolutism, it did not eliminate that administration or coherence; it suffused these forms with a new content, transforming them into something very different. Authority no longer emanated downward; democratic citizenship began to create diversity below, and power began to flow upward. True, absolutism and democracy are both "states," but the qualitative differences between them are decisive.

ON A DIFFERENT plane, the same may be said for the qualitative differences between religion and secular humanism as two "totalizing creeds." So the Mass—I proceed with Ackerman's example although my point applies to devotional rites of any faith—has a singular and exclusivist mission, celebration of the Eucharist by believers. Music in it may vary and be beautiful, but the Mass itself cannot, save by travesty, be varied into a celebration of humanity's rational faculties or of nature or of the state. But what of Ackerman's secular humanist counterpart to the Mass?

Consider:

- Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* hallows nuns who are martyred during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror;
- Pfizner's *Palestrina* extols a sixteenth-century composer who defends polyphonic church music (and includes parts of a Mass in the opera's score) in the face of monodic novelty;
- In Verdi's *Don Carlos*, the church and the Inquisition are castigated, but the opera's liberal is a naive duke who is unwise to the ways of politics;
- Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* protests religious persecution;
- Mozart's *Magic Flute* is, indeed, animated by Freemasonry as Ackerman says, but his point is somewhat complicated by the fact that Mozart's Masonic circles had a Catholic orientation (as Nicholas Till shows in his *Mozart and the Enlightenment*);
- *Mahagonny*, by Brecht and Weil, has Marxist messages.

Many other renowned operas, from those of Monteverdi through Wagner and on, are filled with Greek and Nordic gods or mythological figures.

Do all these works display a common "totalizing" creed? Only if that creed attests that human endowments can combine music and drama so as to present a vast spectrum of experience and human concerns. This hardly seems comparable to religion and the Mass. Yes, yes, Wagnerian acolytes imagine art as religion, Bayreuth as a tabernacle, and the Master's work as writ, but why should a liberal like Ackerman accept Romantic definitions of opera's cultural role?

At the risk of repetition: not all "creeds" totalize in the same way. If opera is an expression of secular humanism, evidently secular-humanist culture can encompass religiosity. Religion, however, cannot do likewise for secularism. Similarly, Masses are inappropriate analogs to opera because their concern in all circumstances is divine worship, which is qualitatively different from tendering a multiplicity of human possibilities. But allowing for a multiplicity of human possibilities is intrinsic to a liberal culture, and so the issue again is whether or not a liberal state can survive without a deeply rooted and privileged culture supporting it. I think that if the secular-humanist air is too thin, liberal democracy won't be able to breathe. Ackerman thinks it can, because he urges a "thoroughgoing disestablishment between the state and a specifically privileged culture—whether it be defined by the texts and celebrations of the Roman or Secular Canon." In those "neutral" circumstances citizens may make choices.

These contentions reflect debates among political theorists about—I simplify—how "embedded" people are in distinctive communities and/or outlooks and what implications this has for citizenship. "Liberals," it is said, imagine that citizens can simply reason together publicly to fashion political rules, "unencumbered" by this or that worldview or cultural or particularistic bias. In "Political Liberalisms," Ackerman denies this by arguing that when individuals become liberal citizens, they "construct a new dimension" or "add yet another role" to their social identity beyond

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"other engagements—with their families, jobs, religious communities, and the like." So liberalism (his, anyway) doesn't presume the "self" to be "unencumbered"; his liberalism bids individuals "to enrich their project of social constitution by adding another role to their repertoire." Taking this role gives one entry into a realm of public reasoning, that of the liberal state. But individuals travel there over different "bridges," that is, by means of independent judgments "rooted" in their "different comprehensive moral views"—Catholic, Kantian, Ackermanian, otherwise. It is out of respect for the different bridges that Ackerman insists here in *Dissent*: no subsidy for Mass, then none for opera, lest the state embrace his own (secular humanist) creed and enter "the business of saving souls by monumentalizing my own views of personal salvation."

As I question the designation of the Mass as a "performance," so I also dissent from regarding citizenship as a "role" to "add" to a "repertoire." Not because each of us has a homogenous "self," but because I think the dimensions of our lives are more interlinked and mutually structuring than Ackerman's "add-on" formulation allows. Granted, political models don't apply to all domains of life (nor do theatrical ones). But can we say that authoritarian family, workplace, or religious settings have no bearings on liberal democratic politics? Traffic on bridges can go two ways; and bridges all rest on structural foundations that come from physics, not the varied metaphysical belief systems of their builders. Looking at history, it seems to me that when illiberal outlooks accommodated to liberalism's rise, they were constrained to do so; it was not a matter of their internal dynamics, that is, judgments "rooted" in their own "comprehensive" views. In any event, no natural law says that comprehensive views are immutable or don't need to recalibrate to abide within a liberal society.

Because Ackerman says that liberal citizenship enriches us in general, I take that to mean it enriches our nonpolitical engagements. Yet don't these engagements cultivate or handicap liberal citizenship? Must one not say the same of the effect of the general cultural framework? If the answer is yes, then a liberal state needs succor by a secular humanism—a culture that is rich and diverse, that cultivates tolerant citizens surely, but also critical ones who make evaluations and pose questions, even to religion and even if those Ackerman calls "devout religionists" find questions disquieting. Given Ackerman's laissez-faire argument, I don't see how any funding of secular arts could be justified, let alone expansive cultural instruction in public schools.

Nonetheless, Ackerman sanctions "a broad-ranging commitment to musical performance and appreciation as part of the state's program of liberal education." So do I; and I think it should range from Gregorian chant to George Gershwin. But what if protest arises: this is really a secular humanist agenda. What if, say, a modern day Platonist cites Socrates inveighing in the *Republic* that "novel fashions in music is a thing to beware of as endangering the whole fabric of society, whose most important conventions are unsettled by any revolution in that quarter." Our Platonist might then infer: my comprehensive creed makes it unacceptable for the public purse to subsidize broad music education. If it is so liberal as to include Wagner's sensuality or Schoenberg's atonality, who knows what comes next?—1960s license? moral breakdown?

And what if a "devout religionist " cites Augustine's worry that music can corrupt worshipers because "the senses are not content to take second place." Augustine writes in the *Confessions*, "When I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin." The religionist might point to Calvin, who, following Paul, warned that as "evil words will pervert good morals," melodic accompaniment "will pierce the heart much more strongly and enter within." One can imagine our religionist then extrapolating far beyond the church's domain: Music, except in restricted usages, can threaten my profound, comprehensive convictions. Broad musical education as part of a state program is not "neutral." It enhances aesthetic sensibilities at the expense of spirituality; secular humanism is thereby subsidized

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surreptitiously.

My response is easy because I think secular humanism should be privileged and I oppose public funding for religious activities (although I would support public funding to produce operas with religious themes or for public concerts of, say, Monteverdi's "Vespers" or Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* or Messiaen's religiously inspired works). Could Ackerman dissent from our Platonist or religionist? I don't see how, given his own liberalism.

If I understand him correctly, even were Ackerman to concede some public subsidies to the arts, he would still exclude opera as cultural welfare for elites and as injurious to operatic culture. But can opera pay for itself? The answer is straightforward: no. And it never has. One reason is its multidimensionality as an art form. It requires the principals, a chorus, an orchestra, dancers, sets, costumes, stagehands, management, and so on and so on. Even if every citizen were given a personal culture budget and spent it wholly on opera, it still couldn't pay for itself.

So the real question is whether or not we want this specific art form to thrive. Although I do not espouse a marketless world, I do favor one in which market-thinking is kept to its proper place. That means that culture and cash should be uncoupled as much as possible. Opera's worth ought not to be judged by who can or cannot afford dearly priced tickets in market-driven societies, but by qualitative considerations, including opera's place in a society's general culture. If decent tickets are affordable mainly to folks who bond with dead ruling classes, this is not due to an intrinsic trait of the art form; it is a problem to be solved. Prosaic seasons of ornate productions are due to the market calculus, not public subsidies. (I too would prefer imaginative calendars, although I have less of a problem with a "ritual cycle of Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner" if only because I also find a ritual cycle of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau invaluable when I teach political theory, and it need not preclude Foucault.)

ONE REASON I am a cultural social democrat is that I want the highest forms of culture to be accessible to everyone. Obviously that is a matter of setting priorities. European governments provide considerable financial assistance to their opera houses but an opera fan's social class is still likely to affect what seat he or she can afford. Public subsidy in the United States is chiefly indirect, through tax deductions taken for contributions, as Jacob Weisberg recently pointed out in *Slate*. One hundred million dollars a year of private donations goes into opera across this country and it translates into $25 million that would have otherwise gone to the Treasury.* I suppose Ackerman's argument compels him to oppose such deductions, and likewise for contributions to religious establishments and even to endowments of Ivy League schools (which, after all, cater secular humanism to an elite).

Ending those deductions would, of course, be calamitous to opera. New York's Metropolitan Opera, with its massive hall of 3,800 seats, covers only 60 percent to 65 percent of costs by means of its high-priced tickets (92 percent are sold) and sundry other receipts. That leaves a fair-sized gap—it would be substantial even with austere productions—which must be filled by corporate and private contributions. I am disquieted by an unavoidable fact: corporations don't subsidize art for its own sake. Recall that Philip Morris announced famously that "it takes art to make a company great"—about the time of the surgeon-general's report on cancer (Norman Lebrecht notes this in his controversial book *When the Music Stops: Managers, Maestros, and the Corporate Murder of Classical Music*, 1997). The *New York Times* recently registered trepidations throughout the art world on account of today's spate of corporate mergers. Merged corporations lead to merged endowments and thus declines in cultural benefaction. Also, as companies forsake one region for another, art in deserted locales may fare like, well, like abandoned ex-employees.

What of private donations? Private cultural philanthropy is surely laudable. But there are

*Jacob Weisberg, "Paying for Opera," *Slate*, September 26, 1998. Among my other sources in this article: "Met Opera Begins Effort to Raise $200 Million," *New York Times*, September 29, 1998; "Corporate Medici Lost to Mergers," *New York Times*, January 5, 1999; David Remnick, "The Imperial Stagehand," *New Yorker*, February 22/March 1, 1999.

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accompanying perils that ought not to be overlooked—such as artistic priorities established by large donors rather than by artistic directors. Lebrecht reports that a long-time benefactor once offered the Met huge sums—provided they were used by her preferred producer. And what, one wonders, may be expected in the future from Alberto Vilar, who pledged twenty-five million dollars to the Met endowment last year. He asks in a recent *New Yorker* article: "Who cares who wrote the libretto? How about the guy who wrote the check?" He adds, "I can't write checks to help the starving in Biafra. That's the government's job. . . . Show me a philanthropist in this country who gives to the homeless. They don't do it. They give to something that's important to them." Well, I suppose opera does not necessarily enhance cultural—not to mention moral—intelligence.

In short, Ackerman and I worry about different things, at least when it comes to the relation between culture, money, and politics. I am much more concerned about the role of the market, corporations, and private wealth than about public subsidies and discomforts posed to religion by secular humanism. In his recent book *The Stakeholder Society*, Ackerman is dismissive of people who speak of "decommodifying" provinces of life; I suppose I am one of them because I am troubled about the extent to which cultural life is mediated by the cash (and corporate) nexus, by means rather than ends.

Suppose someone argued that free speech is in practice largely a privilege of elites in our inegalitarian Western societies—that the rich, the powerful, or the well placed (say, law professors like Ackerman or political theory professors like me) are greatly advantaged in its felicitous exercise or in its exploitation. Although democrats hope it will be otherwise one day, most citizens are not much engaged in public life, save for exceptional circumstances. Yet we would hardly minimize the vital animating value of free speech in a democracy, whatever the flaws. So we favor liberal measures like the First Amendment for what they secure broadly, regardless of how few citizens make speeches on a corner or send letters to the editor—and regardless of how money makes some citizens more equal than others in getting their views into the public arena.

It would be facile to say that free speech is to democracy as opera is to culture because politics is not exactly analogous to artistic endeavor. Still, it seems to me that opera's part in Western cultural development has been especially fecund since its birth four centuries ago. This is not only because of the composers (and in some cases, apologies to Mr. Vilar, librettists) associated with this genre. Opera is distinguished from the other art forms by touching on and absorbing from—indeed needing—virtually all them; its very structure brings together musical, poetic, dramatic, and visual components. I don't mean to imply that grand exemplars of "absolute" music or great literary works or paintings are somehow "lesser" entities—only that this medium influences, embodies, and reflects the strengths, weaknesses, and problems of cultural life in a uniquely wide-ranging way because of its diverse dimensions, its plural nature. Opera's enriching role extends considerably beyond its limited (though growing) following.

If you don't favor separation of culture and state, then opera should be one of many cultural goods supported by public efforts. Its share at a given moment ought, like anything else, to depend on an array of considerations—mainly qualitative but also (alas!!) economic needs, given limited resources and the fact that some cultural institutions raise funds more easily than others. One consideration should surely be inequality in cultural opportunities. Funding might, for one example, defray substantially the cost of opera tickets but not allow higher fees for superstars and their agents. But no important domain of culture should be accessible chiefly to social elites. So I offer a social democratic precept: in access to culture, including high culture, no citizen should be more equal than others. Public funding for arts (opera among them) ought to help make varied forms of culture available in a fair manner to all citizens. ●

MITCHELL COHEN is co-editor of *Dissent*.

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"Lighten Up!": Bruce Ackerman Ripostes

I AM STRUCK by Mitchell Cohen's embattled tone. It is as if we were locked in a life-and-death struggle with the Religious Right, which will settle for nothing less than the utter destruction of secular humanism. Liberals and social democrats should respond in kind, using all the weapons at our command in the ongoing Kulturkampf.

This is no time for unilateral disarmament. We have gained access to the arsenal of state power thanks to the political triumphs of prior generations of liberal democrats. It would make a mockery of their struggles to surrender this hard-won power in the midst of a culture war. To exercise political restraint in the name of neutrality is to blind ourselves to the realities of power and the roots of the modern liberal state in the spirit of Enlightenment philosophy.

I understand our historical situation differently. The Religious Right exists, to be sure, but it is a smallish minority that does not pose a clear and present danger—unless, that is, it somehow manages to recruit a strong majority of co-religionists to its black-and-white view of the world.

This is unlikely. The overriding tendency of religion in America remains liberal. Most *religious* people are quite willing to recognize that the state should try to remain neutral between rival orthodoxies. For some, this is a matter of prudence—they would be happy to endorse theocracy if they were confident that *their* version of orthodoxy would emerge triumphant from the political struggle, but they're not. For others, the separation of church and state is a matter of principle—if religionists enter the political struggle, the result will be the corruption of religion, not the purification of politics. But for whatever reason, the religious majority accepts the notion that, when we speak to one another as American citizens, we should not be making controversial appeals to the nature of God to justify our use of political power in the here-and-now.

This tradition of conversational constraint is a great achievement of American politics. Neither theists nor atheists are likely to silence each others' doubts any time soon. We must reconcile ourselves, then, to the fact that *most Americans believe that most other Americans have made a tragic mistake about the ultimate meaning of life* (either by worshiping a false god or failing to recognize that all gods are false). The only question is whether, despite this deep and troubling fact, Americans can nonetheless construct a form of civic conversation that allows us all to talk to one another with real respect. Twentieth-century practice suggests that the answer is yes—but only by keeping our disagreements over ultimate meaning off the conversational agenda of practical politics as much as possible. By refusing to make ostentatious appeals to the ultimate truth of Christianity or Islam or secular humanism, we allow ourselves to talk to one another as Americans concerned with the solution of practical problems in a way that is worthy of free and equal citizens.

But, of course, this effort to constrain our political conversation on neutralist lines may well unravel during the twenty-first century. Slowly but surely, more and more religious people may become convinced that the radical right is right—the neutralist rhetoric of American politics is merely a screen for the Mitchell Cohens of the world to use state power in the atheist's ceaseless war against religion. If this happens, Cohen will have helped create the very world his critique presupposes—a world of embattled liberalism, in which the idea of a *mutually* respectful civic discourse between atheists and religionists is dismissed as idle chatter, and the only serious question for politics is whether religion is a metaphysical illusion or the ultimate ground for collective salvation.

We are dealing, in short, with the dynamics of self-fulfilling prophecy: the more theists and atheists cultivate a neutralist voice when talking to one another as American citizens, the more it will seem sensible to continue this civic conversation of mutual respect; the more the neutralist voice of common citizenship is disparaged, the less it will thrive. It

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is only by reciprocating moves *from both sides* of the religious/humanist divide that we will manage to deepen, rather than destroy, our common civic conversation.

IT IS FROM this vantage that I urge my fellow secularists to renounce public subsidy for the opera. This is the least we can do to show that disestablishment is not a one-way street—with Catholics getting nothing for St. Patrick's while secular humanists keep the bucks flowing to the Metropolitan Opera from the public treasury. Cohen seeks to evade my appeal for reciprocal restraint by disparaging "their" establishment as "totalizing," while ours, of course, is not. But this misrepresents the case for cultural subsidy.

To see why, consider what a "non-totalizing" understanding of the opera would look like. Once unhinged from any totalizing view, the Met merely provides another form of entertainment no different from skateboarding or hula-hooping. I myself do not hold this view—but for those who do, the case for selective subsidy vanishes immediately: why subsidize opera, and not skateboarding, if they are simply rival entertainments struggling for the consumer dollar?

Mitchell Cohen concedes as much when he urges us to keep "market-thinking" in its proper place and judge the case for subsidy "by qualitative considerations, including opera's place in a society's general culture." But it is precisely at this point that totalizing considerations enter. Cohen himself cites Augustine's worry that music corrupts since "the senses are not content to take second place." How *precisely* is a liberal to respond to such concerns: Is the state publicly to declare Augustine wrong and Wagner right on this profoundly contestable matter? Lighten up Augustine! We Philistines have the votes, and democracies have the right to worship Mammon in whatever lascivious manner they please!

Cohen also worries how far my commitment to neutrality goes in disrupting other traditional cultural arrangements. He points to tax deductions for gifts to nonprofit institutions, and suggests that these too would fail my test of neutrality. But this tax deduction is available for gifts to all charities, religious and secular. Moreover, a neutral rationale for the deduction is readily forthcoming. On this familiar view, a dynamic nonprofit sector is an important part of a larger strategy of checks and balances against totalitarian government. By encouraging the flow of financial resources to civil society, we construct a vital restraint on governmental overreaching. In encouraging charitable contributions, a nondiscriminatory tax policy contributes to the stabilization of a society of free and equal citizens.

This rationale may or may not be persuasive, but judging its merit does *not* require the state to pronounce upon the relative merits of Wagner's or Augustine's rival philosophies. It is enough to affirm that, in a free and equal society, it is up to each citizen, and not the state, to take responsibility for defining the ultimate meaning of life; and that the tax exemption is properly seen as one of many means to assuring this ultimate end.

Cohen also questions whether my position requires me to reject subsidized musical education for the young: if an Augustinian objection to a subsidy for the Met exposes its lack of neutrality, why doesn't the same objection operate as a veto for musical instruction in the schools?

Because children are not adults. Liberal states ought to give equal respect to adults, regardless of their visions of the meaningful life, and should not seek to bribe them to adopt a favored version of culture. But children aren't ready to confront responsibly the cacophony of moral voices characteristic of a free society, and the state's role is to help prepare them for this confrontation as thoughtful citizens. In taking on this task, however, the liberal state is not free to use its educational system to brainwash the young into the majority's favored ideals. Instead, the principle of neutrality requires the liberal school to assure that *all* concerned citizens, regardless of their conception of the good, help shape the range of moral ideals presented to the rising generation. If, for example, ten-year-old youngsters have been exposed to a severely Augustinian parental environment during their early years, a liberal school should seek to devise some (non-threatening) ways to introduce them to the Wagnerian convictions and prac-

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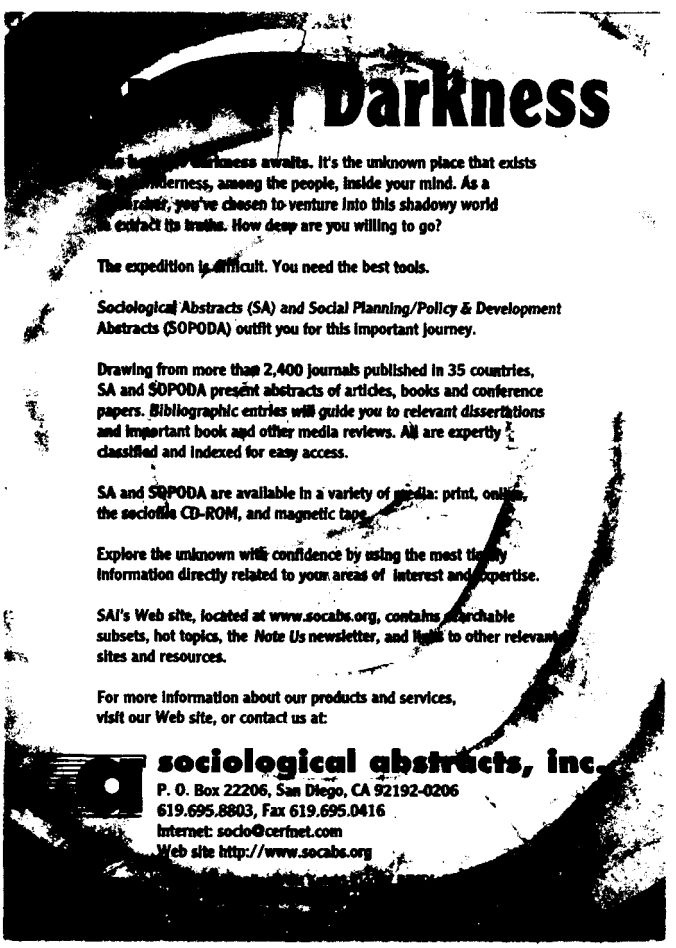
tices of some of the citizens they will encounter upon maturity; and vice versa, for the children of Wagnerians.

Cohen is right to suspect that this liberal principle of educational diversity challenges many prevailing educational practices. It condemns the homogenizing character of much public schooling of the present day—my educational aim is not merely to train kids for the market and the rudiments of democratic life, but to introduce them thoughtfully to the conflicting moral ideals and practices they will encounter as grown-ups. It also challenges the legitimacy of parental efforts to monopolize the moral vision of their children and prevent them from appreciating the conflicting views of their fellow citizens. Instead, it envisions a tension-full relationship between liberal schools and the ongoing efforts by parents and local communities to constrain the moral vision of their children.

I have defended my educational ideals at greater length elsewhere.* Suffice it to say that, with the exception of the rare child coming from an opera-drenched home environment (for whom some Augustinian doubt is in order), my philosophy of education provides ample room for the robust cultivation of the musical imagination. ●

*See *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, chapter 5 (Yale University Press, 1980).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Mississippi Freedom Summer Thirty-five Years Later

Nicolaus Mills

THIRTY-FIVE years ago this summer, a group of college students—most of them white, most of them Northerners, most of them middle class—began gathering at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. They were at first glance no different from the students one would expect to find on any college campus on a June afternoon. But in this case appearances were deceiving. The students were the first wave of a task force of more than seven hundred volunteers that the predominantly black Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)—an alliance made up of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—had recruited to come to Mississippi for the summer.

Mississippi Freedom Summer would show, COFO believed, that the segregationist laws keeping more than 90 percent of Mississippi's eligible blacks from voting could be successfully challenged. They were convinced that if arch-segregationist Mississippi could be cracked, the rest of the South would follow.

This year the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg is honoring Freedom Summer and the unprecedented black-white alliance behind it with a conference and photo exhibit. But around the country very little is being done to recall the summer of 1964. Three decades later we are uneasy about exactly what lessons it teaches.

In 1964 uneasiness also surrounded Freedom Summer. The leader and moving force behind Freedom Summer was Bob Moses, a Harvard-educated New York City school teacher who had been trying to register black voters in Mississippi ever since he came to the small town of McComb in July 1961. Moses quickly became a legend for his courage and his organizational genius, but by 1963, despite the inroads he and the small group of young black SNCC workers he recruited had made, their voter registration efforts were stalled. Mass arrests of civil rights workers by Mississippi law enforcement officials had pushed SNCC's ability to raise bail money to the breaking point, and the Justice Department was of little help in providing SNCC with protection.

The one bright spot in 1963 was SNCC's Freedom Vote campaign in which disenfranchised black voters cast symbolic votes for their candidates for governor and lieutenant governor: Aaron Henry, the president of the Mississippi NAACP, and Ed King, a white chaplain at historically black Tougaloo College. The Freedom Vote campaign was run with the aid of white college students recruited to come to Mississippi and proved an enormous success. More than eighty thousand blacks cast protest votes and the media, intrigued by the idea of out-of-state white students coming to Mississippi, gave SNCC the kind of publicity it had not received for its earlier voter registration efforts.

The aim of Freedom Summer was to repeat the Freedom Vote experience on a wider level. But within SNCC it was also a strategy that was the source of much resentment. The young black organizers that Bob Moses had recruited saw themselves suddenly taking a back seat to white college students who had no real knowledge of Mississippi and who would only be there for a short time. As MacArthur Cotton, a former Freedom Rider and one of SNCC's first Mississippi field secretaries observed, "We've got too much to lose if they come down

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here and create a disturbance in two or three months, and they're gone."

Bob Moses did not doubt that such dangers were real, but he also believed that time was not on SNCC's side. He feared that the automation of cotton picking, the poor education of most Mississippi blacks, and the efforts of the White Citizens Councils to get blacks to leave the state could stop SNCC in its tracks. At a November 1963 SNCC meeting in Greenville, Mississippi, he argued, "We're not going to get people registered the way things are," and then added, "The one thing we can do for the country that no one else can do is be above the race issue."

The volunteers who gathered at Western College for Women seven months later had no sense of how reluctant many in SNCC were to have them come to Mississippi. Only as their training session went on did they begin to grasp the depth of the racial tensions they brought with them. The realization for many was a shock, but it soon gave way to a greater shock. On Sunday, June 21, as the first of two orientation sessions was coming to an end, word came that three Freedom Summer workers, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, who had left for Mississippi early Saturday morning, were missing. Where the real dangers lay in Mississippi was now beyond question.

The three men were not the first civil rights victims in Mississippi, a state that between 1882 and 1952 had 534 reported lynchings. But they were also not the usual victims. Two of them, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, were white. Neither the media nor the public would ignore their deaths. They would instead show how prophetic Bob Moses had been when he told summer volunteers, "When you come south, you bring with you the concern of the country—because the people of the country don't identify with Negroes."

Reporters began questioning Mississippi officials as they never had before, and Lyndon Johnson, still in the first year of his presidency, sent Allen Dulles, former Central Intelligence Agency chief, to investigate. Johnson also began pressing Congress to pass the civil rights bill that had been before it ever since it was submitted by John Kennedy in 1963. On July 2, two days ahead of the July 4 deadline he had set, the president got the civil rights bill he wanted.

In Mississippi, where the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* spoke for most of the state's whites in describing Freedom Summer as "an invasion," none of this was good news. But it was also not grounds for retreat. In addition to the murders of Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, there would be thirty-seven black church burnings, eighty beatings, and more than a thousand arrests of civil rights workers before the summer was over. It was still possible, however, for the Freedom Summer volunteers and COFO staff to work in such an environment. The letters the volunteers wrote home reflect the terror they felt, but despite that terror, they registered voters, started Freedom Schools, and built community centers.

Most of all, by their very presence the Freedom Summer workers let the country see what Mississippi was like. The idea that Mississippi's blacks were apathetic about voting or schooling was shot, as thousands risked their lives to do both. By the time the summer was over, it was the civil rights movement's version of the South that prevailed in the country as a whole.

Freedom Summer would not, however, end as its organizers hoped. Central to COFO's planning was sending delegates from the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) it had helped form to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City to challenge the seating of the all-white official Mississippi Democratic Party. It was a challenge Lyndon Johnson feared. After signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he had been told by his aide Bill Moyers, "I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come." Johnson worried that he could lose the entire South if the white Mississippi delegation were forced to share power with the MFDP. His response was to offer the MFDP two seats at the convention rather than deal with the issues they raised. For COFO and the MFDP, Johnson's back-of-the-bus offer, as it was called, seemed like tokenism, and, after staging a sit-in, they left

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Atlantic City.

The bitterness made sense, especially after the events of Freedom Summer. The problem was that by the fall of 1964, the bitterness didn't just extend to the Democratic Party but to Freedom Summer itself. In June Bob Moses had told the volunteers, "If we can go and come back alive, then that is something. If you can go into Negro homes and just sit and talk, that will be a huge job." Now these limited goals, along with SNCC chairman John Lewis's belief that "the Mississippi Summer Project is never going to end," were brushed aside. Within SNCC, which had been the driving force behind Freedom Summer as well as the dominant civil rights group in Mississippi, the failure of the Democratic Party to honor the MFDP's challenge was seen as proof that it did not pay to work with whites in any area.

There would never be another Freedom Summer. At a meeting held in Waveland, Mississippi, in November, leader after leader argued that the time had come for SNCC to go it alone. It would be more than a year before whites were officially expelled from SNCC, but the thinking that had created the Mississippi Summer Project was over. The way was now prepared for a SNCC that believed, "If we are to proceed toward true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people."

Small wonder then that thirty-five years later we have such difficulty deciding how we should remember Freedom Summer. To honor it in depth, we have to ask questions that are still painful. We have to balance the way Freedom Summer opened up the Deep South, speeded passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and set the stage for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 against the schisms it led to within SNCC and ultimately the entire civil rights movement. Most difficult of all, we have to ask how it is that since the great black-white coalitions of the 1960s came apart, racial progress—in jobs, where only 52 percent of black men have full-time, year-round work, and public education, where nearly 70 percent of black students now attend schools with predominantly minority enrollment—has slowed to a crawl. ●

NICOLAUS MILLS is the author of *Like a Holy Crusade: Mississippi 1964—The Turning of the Civil Rights Movement in America.*

Jo-Ann Mort

War.com

IN THE summer of 1989, when Slobodan Milosevic withdrew Kosovo's political autonomy, I was across Yugoslavia on an achingly beautiful Dalmatian island, in search of a *Herald Tribune*. Let me explain.

Ten years ago, a trip to the island of Brac, in what is now Croatia, meant that for the few weeks I was there, I was essentially dependent on my host, a native speaker, to interpret the world for me. There were no English-language magazines or newspapers in the town's kiosk, nor was there cable television—no CNN, no Sky News. Sometimes during these visits I was so starved for English that I would watch old John Wayne movies with Serbo-Croatian subtitles, just to hear Wayne pronounce the English words. But the lack of English wasn't the real issue. The lack of outside news—or uncensored news—was the real source of my anxiety. Even at the apex of *glasnost*, a haphazard censorship still covered Yugoslavia.

We didn't even have a phone at the house because installation was so expensive; if there was a call, it came to a next door neighbor who yelled to us across the yard. If we visited the larger resort town of Bol, frequented by middle-class Britons on packaged tours, it was possible to pick up a *Daily Mail* and cull a sentence or two of hard news out of its tabloid pages. There were many more possibilities for

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independent news in the cities. In Split, one could buy *Time*, *Newsweek*, or the *Economist*, and in Dubrovnik, one could even find the *Herald Tribune* and a higher class of British paper—say, the London *Times* or the *Telegraph* (but no *Guardian*—were all those British tourists Tories?). And there were some independent publications published in Serbo-Croatian.

As the years progressed and as Yugoslavia disintegrated, telephones became more accessible, cable came to the islands, and the lack of print product available in the little kiosk in front of the coffee shop on the promenade near the marina didn't matter as much. Eventually, schlepping my computer to the island meant that I would have e-mail and Internet access, as do tens of thousands of people in Yugoslavia and its former republics.

I RECALLED THAT feeling of information isolation while watching news of the current horrors in Kosovo. Remembering those weeks of news deprivation made me realize that just as the Gulf War was a CNN war, the Kosovo War harkens the coming of age of the Internet. Just ten years ago, Yugoslavia's communications structure was rudimentary; today, all one needs to find out what's going on—in any language—is a modem and a laptop.

Not only in Yugoslavia itself but around the world, the Internet has changed citizens' relationship to the war. Discussion groups among anonymous discussants in the United States, Belgrade, and elsewhere became so popular that some of them were closed for lack of space. (I confess, I have no idea what "lack of space" means in virtual reality.) Left-wing debates about the role of the United States in maintaining global order have flown back and forth by e-mail. In the best sense, this taking of pen to hand—albeit with fingers and keyboard—has forced arguments to be more focused and researched. I wonder: will better-honed arguments mean more effective activism?

But it was in news gathering that the Internet made the most difference this time. *Slate* magazine found its niche, as CNN did during the Gulf War. It published daily dispatches from Masha Gessen, the Russian journalist who began her dispatches writing anonymously from Belgrade because she feared for her safety. Her entries were reminiscent of journals found after World War II, written with immediacy and drama, where the words themselves almost take on a hushed pallor on the page as the writer fears his or her discovery.

Other Web sites also used Internet journals as a device to expand their reporting. Ironically, where television failed to give detailed or insightful analyses of the war, their Internet sites at least gave more in-depth perspective. Here, the talking heads on the television screen came out from behind the ubiquitous background roll of refugees at border points, as reporters filed stories on the networks' Web pages, which essentially told the news that ended up on the cutting-room floor. CNN even featured e-mail from people in Yugoslavia.

For those inside the war zone, the Internet and e-mail probably proved a virtual lifeline and for the rest of us, it offered immediate war coverage. The *New York Times* reporting was generally insightful, and analytic—but the print medium showed its limitations in the world of cable and the Internet. With the bombing taking place at night, the seven-hour time difference between the United States and Europe made the news a day old when it appeared in the morning paper. As Michael Massing pointed out in the *Nation*, while the CNN coverage was superficial or even sycophantic (toward either NATO or the Serbs, depending on the correspondent), it still had the advantage of immediacy, which is lost in newspapers and magazines. But Internet coverage at its best offered the virtues of both print and television: more immediacy *and* more depth.

Milosevic, who took television censoring to a new high—filling the screen with old World War II films in between his state-controlled newscasts—didn't (well, couldn't) censor Web sites outside of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia today is a wired society; e-mail and computers abound. Milosevic made no efforts to stop the computer revolution within his otherwise isolated country. Yuppie sites like Beonet and Beograd.com offer everything from listings of cafes and art galleries to concert

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schedules and e-mails about life in the midst of bombing.

The Milosevic regime even has its own Web site: Serbia-info.com, where the Information Ministry crams news of the day, translated into rudimentary English, with highlights like "Organizing the ethnic Albanian terrorists around the world" or "Another message of love and peace from Belgrade: eighteen couples at a collective wedding ceremony send a message to the world that love is stronger than bombs." The site includes a software program to download your very own target symbol for civilian wear—the one seen all over the streets of Belgrade, the bull's eye with the phrase "These are NATO targets."

While television images fade and newsprint crumbles, Web sites remain until their sponsors take them down. Even if a site isn't updated, the homepage lives in virtual reality. When Milosevic silenced radio stations B21 in Kosovo and B92 in Belgrade, they transmitted via the Internet. With RealPlayer software, one could listen to the dissident radio from anywhere in the world, even if it was no longer playing on the radio band. That was too much Internet for Milosevic. Finally, he had to seal off B92 completely, in addition to destroying its radio signal, so that the broadcasts couldn't take place on the Internet. But, as of this writing, if you log on to www.b92.net, you can find this message from the station's director, Sasa Mirkovic: "Radio B92 closed down and sealed off/On Friday, April 2/Struggle Continues, We Shall Never Surrender." The photos of distress on the site are frozen in time.

WILL ALL THIS knowing make any difference? To coin a phrase, the trick is not simply to imagine the world but to change it. Here, too, the Internet offered new avenues by which to construct a virtual community. America Online offered software on its home page so that one could e-mail congressional representatives with opinions about U.S. involvement in Yugoslavia. Many nongovernmental organizations updated their sites with information about where to send refugee-relief contributions and what was being done with these donations. The kind of oral arguments that might once have happened in meeting rooms or on street corners were happening in chat rooms. But will all this interconnectedness matter? Will we not only log on, but engage in the world? Whether microchips (and computer-guided bombs) can defeat a common thug may be one of the remaining ironies of the end of this century. ●

JO-ANN MORT, a member of the *Dissent* editorial board, edited the new anthology *Not Your Father's Union Movement: Inside the AFL-CIO* .

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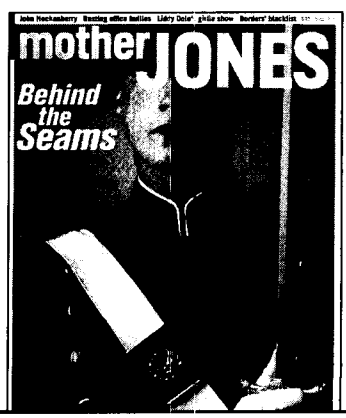

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Puny Expectations

George Scialabba

THE END OF UTOPIA: POLITICS AND CULTURE IN AN AGE OF APATHY
by Russell Jacoby
Basic Books, 1999 236 pp $26

"IF YOU can't say anything nice," my mother used to admonish, "don't say anything at all." Presumably Russell Jacoby's mother told him the same thing. (All mothers do.) Fortunately, he disobeyed her and has written some of the most useful, tactless, and entertaining cultural criticism of recent decades. *Social Amnesia* (1975) traced the Americanization of psychoanalysis, in the course of which it lost sight of how society constrains subjectivity and hence lost its critical edge. *Dialectic of Defeat* (1981) surveyed the "Western Marxist" tradition of Lukács, Korsch, et al. *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), his best-known book, deplored the extinction of independent intellectuals, with wide interests and a broad general readership, and their replacement by academics and journalists housed in institutions and writing primarily for peers. *Dogmatic Wisdom* (1994) blasted both sides in the culture wars—militant multiculturalists and apocalyptic neoconservatives—for "litigating over property lines when the house is on fire"; that is, while liberal education "shatters under the weight of commercialism" and while the "irresistible power of advertising and television" produces a "monoculture of clothes, music, and cars." Jacoby's arguments were often original and were unfailingly astute, though not always couched in the gentlest, most collegial tones. One finished these books with a heightened appreciation of many intellectuals' capacity for vapidity, trivialization, and self-importance.

The End of Utopia continues Jacoby's broadside against contemporary intellectuals, particularly those on the left. Their horizons have shrunk, he charges; explicitly or implicitly, they have acquiesced in the general conviction that "this society is the only possible one." Critics of the political economy take for granted competition and commodity production, timidly suggesting only minor modifications in the operation of markets. Multiculturalists absurdly equate their demands for increased turf, pelf, and status with a program for radical social transformation. The "idiom of pluralism and rights" bounds the imagination of philosophers. Whether or not the "end of ideology" and the "end of history" correctly describe the world, they all too aptly characterize the left's worldview.

> Today socialists and leftists do not dream of a future qualitatively different from the present. . . . Almost everywhere the left contracts, not simply politically but, perhaps more decisively, intellectually. . . . At best radicals and leftists envision a modified society with bigger pieces of pie for more customers. They turn utilitarian, liberal, and celebratory. The left once dismissed the market as exploitative; it now honors the market as rational and humane. The left once disdained mass culture as exploitative; now it celebrates it as rebellious. The left once honored independent intellectuals as courageous; now it sneers at them as elitist. The left once rejected pluralism as superficial; now it worships it as profound. We are witnessing not simply the defeat of the left but its conversion, and perhaps inversion.

Much grapeshot follows, trained on an impressively wide range of targets for so short a book: Robert Kuttner's *Everything for Sale*, Michael Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent*, Michael Tomasky's *Left for Dead*, Ralph Miliband's *Socialism for a Skeptical Age*, John Roemer's *A Future for Socialism*, Michael Albert's *Thinking Forward*, Lawrence Levine's

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The Opening of the American Mind, Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Jonathan Culler, Tony Judt, Edward Said, Stanley Fish, Clifford Geertz, bell hooks, *Social Text*, Toffler-style futurism, mass-culture studies, and sundry other persons, texts, and discourses. (There are even a few digs—unfair but amusing—at the ineffably subtle Richard Rorty and the wise and reverend Michael Walzer.) Here, in Jacoby's mordant asides, is the chief fun and profit of the book. Some comfortably tenured leftists, he remarks, "see themselves as outsiders, blasting the establishment. Like uptown executives cruising around in pricey jeeps and corporate lawyers in luxurious utility trucks, they pose as rugged souls from the back country; they threaten the seats of power as they glide into their reserved parking spots." The radical program on multiculturalism "might be characterized as jargon attached to an air compressor." Three bemused paragraphs contemplating a Foucaultian critique of the Santa Cruz municipal anti-discrimination ordinance are a stitch. Like Dwight Macdonald (one of the few intellectuals he admires), Jacoby is important above all as a cultural hygienist, scouring verbal plaque and conceptual decay with his high-powered electric-sarcastic drill.

To deal the Zeitgeist a box on the ear is one thing, however; to account for it is another. What explains the eclipse of utopianism? In a sense, the answer is obvious: utopia lies buried in the rubble of communism. As Jacoby points out, cold-war thinkers consistently equated utopia with totalitarianism and liberal pluralism with democracy; and they carried the day. There were undoubtedly good counterarguments: in particular, that Stalinism was not in the least a utopian experiment but was more like czarism plus electricity. But arguments are no defense against plausible and politically convenient simplifications. For every pundit, editorialist, and politician in America since roughly World War II, the automatic qualification of "utopia" as impractical and/or dangerous, and probably un-American, saved thought.

Still, one must give the Zeitgeist its due: what most people believe is not invariably false. There is a rational kernel within the shell of anti-utopian prejudice. It is simply this: we all want to see the plans. And there are no plans. A century or more of resonant but empty slogans urging revolution, liberation, the abolition of money, the end of scarcity, a world without work (or conflict or hierarchy or alienation or authority or force) have at last produced widespread skepticism about all fundamental criticism and exalted aspiration.

Utopian slogans have worked much mischief. (Jacoby himself is not wholly innocent: scoffing at mundane social democratic talk about full employment and retraining the workforce, he reminds us loftily that "once upon a time leftists and radicals talked of liberation and the abolition of work." So they did; but what, if anything, did they mean by it?) The remedy is not to give up on utopia but to stop sloganizing. To begin with, what does "utopia" mean? Jacoby, like the "negative thinkers" of the Frankfurt School, whom he quotes approvingly, is not generous with specifics, apparently as a matter of principle. But he does offer a helpful definition. The core utopian conviction is "that the future could fundamentally surpass the present . . . that the future texture of life, work, and even love might little resemble that now familiar to us . . . that history contains possibilities of freedom and pleasure hardly tapped."

UTOPIA, THEN, is in the *future*. Why is this worth emphasizing? Revolutionists and abolitionists, utopia's false friends, insist that it can be constructed out of present materials through a heroic act of will. This is to underestimate recklessly the depth and subtlety of the necessary changes and the intricacy and inertia of every moral culture. Utopia is impossible unless, among an overwhelming majority, solidarity and trust are nearly instinctive; responsibility, self-reliance, initiative, honesty, and other civic virtues are practiced much more widely than now; and democratic habits of self-confidence, candor, and tact are far better developed. Channels of communication and public information are as yet rudimentary. And let's not forget rhetorical skills like wit, fluency, and concision: without a vast improvement in the general level of these, attendance at all the necessary meetings on the

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way to utopia will result in an epidemic of premature brain death. With all these moral and psychological changes in place, we can make a start on the technical problem—no less complex, probably—of reconciling equity and efficiency in production and distribution.

Obviously such drastic and intimate changes, on the requisite scale, without undemocratic coercion or divine intervention, cannot be accomplished in a generation, or probably even in a few generations. Carrying off a general strike may be a fine thing, but creating a new moral ecology is an infinitely more difficult and valuable thing. In the *Fabian Essays*, defending gradualism against the revolutionists and abolitionists of his day, George Bernard Shaw wrote:

> The right is so clear, the wrong so intolerable, the gospel so convincing, that it seems to them that it must be possible to enlist the whole body of workers, soldiers, policemen, and all—under the banner of brotherhood and equality; and at one great stroke to set Justice on her rightful throne. Unfortunately, such an army of light is no more to be gathered from the human product of nineteenth century civilization than grapes are to be gathered from thistles.

Ditto for the human product of twentieth-century civilization. And even an army of light won't be enough, if a majority or a substantial minority remain benighted. The whole society, more or less, must see the light, or it isn't utopia.

The foregoing would be a counsel of despair if the human race were only going to last for a few generations. But utopia's enemies must, if they're logical, deny that such changes are possible in *any* number of generations; must assert, in essence, that humankind has already attained its farthest point of moral development and that our present level of social virtue cannot be substantially improved on *in saecula saeculorum*. This is even more implausible than revolutionism. The wisdom and generosity of the corporate boardroom and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page may be the best we can do in 1999. But by 2500? Surely it's more likely that we'll all be as gods by then than that we won't have evolved beyond Robert Bartley and Steve Forbes. Today half the human race has no sanitation, one-fourth has no clean water, one-fifth no adequate housing, and one-sixth no basic health services, while the amount Americans and Europeans spend annually on pet food, cosmetics, and ice cream would supply all those necessities, plus basic education, to everyone in the world who lacks them, with a great deal left over. Do antiutopians really believe that this vile state of affairs, or its moral equivalent, will persist until 2500 and beyond? It's too fantastic.

Moral progress is not inevitable, but it is not impossible. It is slow, painful, and uncertain; this is another way of putting the tragic view of life. That view is noble and true, but it is not the same as the lazy, self-serving assumption that things can never be radically better and so there's no point racking one's brains to come up with any possible steps in that direction.

What steps, then? Here I have some differences with Jacoby. He thinks modest reform schemes like Kuttner's and Roemer's—involving corporate tax incentives, citizen "policy juries," asset redistribution by means of coupons, and the like—are part of the problem and warms instead to the turgid deliverances of Bloch and Marcuse and the inspired rant of Fourier. I think there's no harm in the latter but find the former more useful by a long shot. Kuttner, Roemer, Alec Nove, et al. leave you feeling that they understand capitalism every bit as rigorously as its defenders—see the point of it, so to speak—yet are convinced it's a long way from the best that can be had, even if they can't quite articulate that "best." Suitably modest but sufficiently roused: this seems the right frame of mind just now for twenty-fifth-century utopianism.

I think, too, that a return to metaphysics, which Jacoby seems to favor, is not a step in the right direction. He finds in Rousseau, Whitehead, Marcuse, and other thinkers a "logic of negativity," according to which oppressive empirical reality is denied and transcended by means of a liberating metaphysical ur-reality. "Metaphysical universals inhere in the world, but transcend it," he explains. "An individual event may be 'untrue' in that it is contradicted by reality, but this untruth ex-

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presses its achievement or different truth, its basis in metaphysical principles." Hmm. Jacoby and his postmodern, anti-metaphysical antagonists seem to be making symmetrical arguments. His syllogism runs: "Only metaphysical principles can generate utopian ideals; utopian ideals are indispensable; ergo, metaphysical principles are valid." Their syllogism runs: "Only metaphysical principles can generate utopian ideals; metaphysical principles are invalid; ergo, utopian ideals are a fraud." But the shared major premise is wrong. Utopian ideals are indeed indispensable, but metaphysical principles are indeed invalid, and this is possible because the ideals don't depend on the principles. Ideals are not propositions; they are expressions of what the eighteenth century called "sympathy" or "benevolence" and what we may simply call moral imagination. The capacity to envision a more decent world is like the capacity to imagine beautiful forms. Both require a native endowment of sensibility, moral or aesthetic, cultivated by training and experience and not choked off by pressing personal burdens or insecurities. Bugger "metaphysical principles." Besides, the historical evidence is mostly the other way. Priestley and Diderot, Hazlitt and Shelley, Mill and Morris, Shaw and Wells, Russell and Dewey were all metaphysical skeptics and utopian radicals. Were they all merely confused?

One of my favorite utopians is Matthew Arnold, to whom Jacoby devotes several eye-opening pages. Though hijacked by conservatives, Arnold belongs in the pantheon of the left. He championed high culture: nearly everyone knows that, and that is all nearly everyone knows. But he was also, consistently and emphatically, an egalitarian. He thought the most important thing in life was the free development of one's highest faculties, to which everyone had a right; that this was only possible in a society without gross material and educational inequality; and that the best way to correct such inequality was democratic state action. His defense of tradition was not in the least anti-democratic; on the contrary.

Arnold kept his distance from contemporary politics. He called himself a "Liberal of the future." It was essential, he believed, to keep alive a sense of large and distant possibilities and to leaven the quotidian with it. A gracious life, a life of "sweetness and light," with ready access to "the best that has been thought and said in the world" and the resources and leisure to assimilate it: no society could be considered just in which all this was not universally available. The "secret of the life of the future," he wrote, is "civilization made pervasive and general." But that will require much slow effort, as he reminded radicals, and a lot of money, as he warned conservatives.

Arnold's "Liberalism of the future" seems to me the very pattern of an intelligent utopianism. If alive today he would, I have no doubt, sympathize with single-payer universal health care and a rise in the minimum wage and deprecate a reduced capital-gains tax and across-the-board deregulation. But mainly, he would gently insist that this society is not "the only possible one." To cowed leftists and smug rightists he would repeat, in the name of the best that has been thought and said in the world, that "the ideal life is, in sober and practical truth, none other than man's normal life, as we shall one day know it." ●

GEORGE SCIALABBA is a book critic in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

WANDERING THE WEB?

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Untold Stories

Ruth Rosen

BETTY FRIEDAN AND THE MAKING OF *THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE*: THE AMERICAN LEFT, THE COLD WAR, AND MODERN FEMINISM
by Daniel Horowitz
The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998
352 pp $29.95

In 1967, when I first became immersed in the women's movement, I began searching for our origins in history. Surely, we had not invented the wheel. I kept having the inchoate thought that something was missing, buried, just out of our sight. A naive pioneer in the field of women's history, I knew that there had to be more than Kennedy liberalism, the civil rights movement, and the student and antiwar movements.

New Left men had links with the Old Left, even when they defied or infuriated their radical elders. Where was our generational continuity to women of the past? True, the Old Left had always raised "the Woman Question" and condemned "male chauvinism." But the only direct connections between women of the Old and New Left that I clearly recognized was that which yoked red-diaper daughters to their mothers.

Although our historical amnesia is gradually being replaced with reluctant memories, Daniel Horowitz's splendid new book, *Betty Friedan and the Making of* The Feminine Mystique, will still surprise–even shock—many Americans because he directly links modern feminism to the left of the thirties and forties. As I know from my own research, there are brave and brilliant women in their seventies and eighties who believe that Dan Horowitz has "outed them." But that was not his goal. Above all, his book demonstrates the historical significance of their leftist feminism and honors their extraordinary accomplishments. Still, I understand their fears. McCarthyism cast a shadow of self-censorship across the intellectual landscape—destroying a credible noncommunist left, squelching intellectual and political opposition, and forcing a political consensus that glossed over America's simmering racial, gender, economic, ecological, and social problems.[1] It instilled a deep habit of silence, even for those who were–and are–deeply proud of the political work and commitment that characterized their entire lives.

Among this cohort of politically engaged women was Betty Friedan, who in 1963 described herself as an "educated housewife," and published the results of interviews she had conducted with her former classmates from Smith College. In the privacy of their suburban homes, these housewives revealed the depths of their despair to her. Blessed with good providers, nice homes, and healthy children, they puzzled over their unhappiness. Not knowing that other women shared their troubles, they experienced them as personal and blamed themselves for their misery. Friedan called this inchoate unhappiness "the problem that has no name."

To quell their conflicts, some of the interviewees took tranquilizers, cooked gourmet meals, or focused obsessively on their children. In search of stimulation, some housewives sought out sexual affairs or volunteered their time to churches, schools, and charitable organizations. Some women stuffed their houses with shiny new laborsaving devices. Yet something always seemed to be missing. Many of these educated women, Friedan discovered, had nurtured dreams that were never realized, but also never forgotten. The postwar conviction that women should limit their lives exclusively to home and hearth had

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tied them to the family, closed other opportunities, and crushed many spirits. Friedan dubbed this powerful belief system "the feminine mystique," and her book of that name became an instant best-seller.

In many ways, Friedan's background made her an ideal person to expose such domestic unhappiness to the American public. Born and reared in Peoria, Illinois, Betty Goldstein graduated from Smith College in 1942, already well versed in left-wing ideals of social justice and economic equality. After college, she joined the swirling intellectual and political world of leftist politics, worked as a journalist, and in 1947 married Carl Friedan. When she became pregnant with her second child, she was fired by her employer—not an unusual experience for working women at the time.

She and her husband then settled into a suburban life in which she experienced firsthand the isolation of a housewife. But even as she raised three children, she continued to write for mainstream women's magazines. To ease her own burdens as a mother and a writer, she hired a housekeeper, but when other housewives described the isolation and narrowness of their lives, she clearly understood their frustration. She also had the political savvy to see the significance of their complaints and the skills with which to describe them movingly on paper. Readers of her book imagined her as a sister housewife, trapped in the gilded cage of a suburban home, restless and impatient to lead a life of her own.

In fact, Friedan already had a life of her own, one far more politicized than that of the average housewife or magazine writer. As a longtime activist on the antifascist left and in union struggles, and as an experienced labor journalist for the *UE News,* the newsletter of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Friedan had early targeted the plight of women workers. In 1952, she wrote a manual titled *UE Fights for Women Workers,* which described how the most communist-influenced union of the postwar era had fought the discrimination practiced against women workers.

Although she continued to write about women's problems throughout the fifties, Friedan never imagined herself a feminist. "By the time I got to college," she explained, "the first century of struggle for women's rights had been blotted out of the national memory and the national consciousness." True enough. But to women in and around the Popular Front of the 1930s (the loose political alliance against fascism among communist, progressive, and labor groups), the very word "feminist" conjured up images of spoiled bourgeois ladies who voted Republican. Women of the left instead debated the "the Woman Question" or the plight of female workers, but certainly not the problems of middle-class housewives.[2]

When Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique,* she chose to omit her radical past from her account of her life. Early drafts of the manuscript, as Horowitz's research richly reveals, contained a far more daring vision, including a proposal for national legislation to create a "G.I. Bill" to promote women's education. But in a country that had only recently passed through the violently anticommunist convulsion of McCarthyism, Friedan feared her ideas would be discredited if she focused on the problems of working women or advocated government intervention in the affairs of women. So she settled on a safer strategy, that of addressing middle-class white housewives as a sister suburbanite.[3]

Gerda Lerner, a longtime activist and later a historian of women, worried about this decision. "I have just finished reading your splendid book and want to tell you how excited and delighted I am with it. . . . You have done for women . . . what Rachel Carson [author of the pioneering ecological expose *Silent Spring*] did for the birds and trees." But she also objected to Friedan's exclusion of black, poor, and working women, anticipating what would become a widespread criticism of the *Feminine Mystique,* as well as of the contemporary women's movement. But Friedan made a choice to be heard, not to be red-baited, and in America, that meant addressing the middle class. So she concentrated on the power of the feminine mystique, creating a concept through which she then accused the entire society and culture—the media, science, psychiatry, education, and social sciences—of a conspiracy to

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limit the lives of women.[4]

Even so, Friedan's accusations incited widespread hostility. "Many were violently outraged,"she later wrote," at the charge that American women have been seduced back into the doll's house, living through their husbands and children instead of finding individual identity in the modern world. I was cursed, pitied, told to get psychiatric help; to go jump in the lake and accused of being 'more of a threat to the United States than the Russians.'" But many American magazines and journals reviewed *The Feminine Mystique* favorably. Excerpted in several women's magazines, read by three million people, debated in the *Boston Globe,* the book reached a huge population of American women and men.[5]

Using the language of personal growth, Friedan challenged women to live examined and purposeful lives. With the publication of *The Feminine Mystique,* each dissatisfied housewife, at last, knew she was not alone. "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says, 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.'" With phrases as simple as that, Friedan opened a Pandora's box and out tumbled the unnamed complaints that would mobilize one potential constituency of the modern women's movement.

For some women, Friedan's revelations came not a minute too soon. Letters arrived by the hundreds, as housewives poured out their confusion, despair, self-contempt, or determination to change. Her book reached an audience much broader than the women she had interviewed. Readers came from backgrounds that bore little resemblance to that of the college-educated housewives whose complaints filled the book. Written by hand, sometimes in crayon or pencil, some letters were barely literate, and not the products of college graduates, but these women, too, knew that something was seriously wrong with their lives. They blessed Friedan, described their despair, and begged for advice about how to change their lives. "Help!" pleaded one woman, "I have read your views on woman's emancipation and thoroughly agree with you on all accounts—but—how does one go about it?" Some women painfully revealed their sense of hopelessness, the arrogance of psychiatrists they had consulted, the indifference of their husbands. Others wrote of the changes they were making: the return to school; the search for a new job; even simple symbolic acts like the purchase of a toy stethoscope for a baby daughter. [6]

For all its insights, *The Feminine Mystique* was not without shortcomings. Well acquainted with social and economic analysis, Friedan nevertheless focused on the psychological search for a new identity outside of the home. She ignored the different obstacles faced by working-class and minority women, championed careers as though women could easily find well-paid, meaningful work in a sex-segregated labor force, and failed to question the presumption that women bore responsibility for all domestic work. In short, her book was a call for self-realization, not a statement of feminist public policy. By 1960, when the mass media, including almost all the women's magazines, suddenly discovered what they dubbed "The Trapped Housewife," the woes of the suburban housewife were already less than a well-kept secret. But it took Friedan to put that secret onto the national political agenda.[7]

Friedan's career as a whole, as Horowitz's book reveals, has always focused on social and economic justice, rather than on lifestyle issues. This has been a strength as well as a weakness. It kept her from understanding the need to protect the rights of lesbians, whom she viewed as a "lavender menace" in the late 1960s. At the same time, Friedan—and other women like her—also had the political savvy and experience to realize that how you dressed, how you cut your hair, whether or not you wore make up, where you worked and with whom you slept, did not necessarily make you a radical or define a revolutionary politics. Like many women of the Old Left, Friedan had absorbed the discipline to keep her eye on social and economic justice, despite the cultural and social subordination women activists experienced.

The incipient civil rights movement of the late forties and fifties produced many experienced female activists, some of whom would

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influence younger women or turn into important feminist leaders themselves. Among their many contributions, such leftist feminists gave a new generation of young women the gift of women's history. Eleanor Flexner author of *Century of Struggle* (1959), the first accessible study of the suffrage movement, had worked in the Communist Party during the thirties, organized workers into radical labor unions during the war, and then worked in the Congress of American Women, a radical women's group devoted to economic, racial, and gender justice. Interviewed near the end of her life, Flexner credited the left movement with opening up both the fields of African-American and women's history in universities. "I can definitely trace the origins of my book," she explained, "to some of my contacts with Communists like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Claudia Jones (who was quite unknown to the large white community)." Another major contribution to women's history that grew out of this cohort of committed political activists was "The Lady and the Mill Girl," an article by Gerda Lerner that described the ways in which the industrial revolution had affected women of different classes. Later, Aileen Kraditor, another left activist, wrote *Ideas of the Woman's Suffrage Movement* (1965), an intellectual history of the nineteenth-century women's movement that would help jump-start the field of women's history.[8]

Some of these women kept a very low profile during the fifties. Through their local activism, they helped preserve a spirit that would prove crucial to the rebirth of the modern women's movement. Many women gained invaluable organizing, oratorical, and writing skills as activists in labor unions, the civil rights movement, and other left movements. We will never know their numbers; we surely will never know all their names and accomplishments. McCarthyism drove many of them into silence and anonymity, but some kept the "woman question" alive in tough times, and taught a new generation of daughters their "mother tongue." The continuity between women of the Old and New Left is a missing link in twentieth-century political and social history. To his great credit, Daniel Horowitz, who labored long in the archives, has produced a fascinating, even riveting, account of how the legacy of one generation of women of the American left ended up influencing and shaping a generation of New Left women. It is a vital story, and a story well told. ●

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[1]For a lengthy discussion of the full impact of McCarthyism on American culture and society, see Ellen Schrecker's magisterial work, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988).

[2]Ruth Rosen, "Feminism and Liberalism," *Tikkun,* (November 1988).

[3]Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 25. The term "popular front feminist" is used by Daniel Horowitz to describe women of the Old Left who had always been interested in the problems working women faced.

[4]Gerda Lerner to Betty Friedan, Feb. 6, 1963, box 201, folder 715, Betty Friedan Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University. Cited and quoted with permission by Daniel Horowitz, "Rethinking Betty Friedan," *American Quarterly,* March 1996, pp.1-31

[5]Clipping, reviews of *The Feminine Mystique*, box 18, folder 676, Betty Friedan Papers. Letter in response to the *Feminine Mystique*, folder 739, box 21, Betty Friedan Papers, Schlesinger Library. *McCall's* magazine, 1963, p.38.

[6]Folder 617, *Feminine Mystique* Letters, Friedan Papers, Schlesinger Library.

[7]"The Girls," *Life,* August 1949, pp. 39-40; "An Introduction by Mrs. Peter Marshall," *Life*, 24, December 1956, pp. 2-3; Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* p. 44.This included the *New York Times, Newsweek, Harper's Bazaar, Redbook, Time,* and *CBS Television.*

[8]Eleanor Flexner, quoted by Fitzpatrick, p. xiv. Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl," first appeared in *Midcontinent American Studies*, Vo 10, no.1, 1969.

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Coping with Mental Health

Kathleen Kisner

PROZAC DIARY
by Lauren Slater
Random House, 1998 203 pp $21.95

IN THE RICH but little-known literature of mental illness, *Prozac Diary* shines. This slim, elegant memoir, a pastiche of journal entries and meditations, describes the transformative powers of Prozac on Lauren Slater's life over a ten-year period. She tells her story simply and beautifully, with so few embellishments that its dramatic essence may be lost on some readers.

Some may be tempted to dismiss the book on the basis of the title, because Prozac has become a jokey radio drive-time synonym for cosmetic psychopharmacology. Others may confuse it with Elizabeth Wurtzel's 1994 story of depression, *Prozac Nation*. The truth is, we have not heard Slater's story before. One of the first people in the United States to take Prozac, Slater is a woman whose chronic mental illness prevented her from leading a normal life for her first twenty-six years. Her book chronicles not the descent into depression, but the difficult journey into a world of "normalcy" by someone who had never experienced it.

The prevailing pattern for mental-illness memoirs in the 1990s has covered different ground, the descents into madness and triumphs over mental illness by prominent men and women who tell their stories to educate the public about the disease. Two classic memoirs, William Styron's *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* and Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*, concentrate on educating readers about the biochemical nature of such illnesses and the stigma that prevents many people from seeking treatment. Styron published his eloquent essay about pre-Prozac-era depression in 1990, concentrating on the intermingled factors of abnormal chemistry, behavior, and genetics that resulted in the severe depressive illness that struck him at age sixty. Jamison, a psychologist who teaches in the Johns Hopkins University psychiatry program, concentrates more on transcendence than on the disease, and makes a point of writing about the many productive writers, artists, and scientists who have done important work despite the disease. These books are testaments of courage by people whose willingness to "come out" and risk the stigma of illness have given hope to millions.

Slater appears to fit this profile of successful professional who goes public about her illness. The winner of the 1993 New Letters Literary Award in creative nonfiction and of the 1994 Missouri Review Award, she is a clinical psychologist who also teaches creative nonfiction writing at Goucher College. Her impressive credentials include a master's degree in psychology from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in psychology from Boston University. She is the author of the critically acclaimed *Welcome to My Country*, a collection of essays about her work with schizophrenic men, in the last chapter of which she revealed that she had been hospitalized for major depression.

BUT IN *Prozac Diary*, Slater explains she was severely incapacitated by depression until her mid-twenties. Without the Federal Drug Administration's approval of Prozac in 1988, it is unlikely that we would have heard Slater's story at all. When her doctor prescribed Prozac to relieve the burgeoning symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder she had developed in addition to depression, her identity was defined by chronic mental illness. So debilitating was her condition

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that she was unable to hold a job, had never attended a rock concert or traveled, and lived in a basement apartment she had not managed to furnish or even to clean during her two-year tenancy.

She believes the effects of Prozac are in direct proportion to the subjective distress of the consumer. She writes, "I had experienced my various psychiatric conditions as devastating. I was five and the roses were red claws. I was ten and terrified to go outside. I was twelve and grew so thin the bones turned to blades in my neck. In secret, on our wide porch, I cut myself. I knew nothing of pleasure. At fifteen, right when my life should have been growing, it warbled and shrank to the size of a hard, dark dot."

She had been hospitalized five times for depression by the age of twenty-six. For many years she had written poetry and stories, inspired by the voices of eight people she saw as living inside of her, the most memorable of whom was Blue Baby, an infant she envisioned as sometimes dying, sometimes dead. In 1988 she began to develop symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder—tapping surfaces, compulsively checking the burners on the stove.

When she finally decided to risk taking the new drug Prozac, the results were stunning. "And then one morning, about five days after I'd first started the drug, I opened my eyes at eight a.m. I'd turned out my light at midnight, which meant I'd gotten, for the first time in many months, a seamless eight hours of sleep. It was a Saturday, and stripes of sun were on my walls. I sat up."

Slater compares Prozac to a piano tuner that adjusts her biochemical rhythms:

> This is what was different—tempo, tone. Not sight, for everything looked the same. Not smell, for everything smelled the same. Not pitch, for the vibrations of the world were just as they'd always been. To describe the subtle but potent shift caused by Prozac is to tussle with failing words, sensations that seep beyond language. But that doesn't make it any less miraculous. Doctors assure the public that psychotropic drugs don't get a patient high; rather, supposedly they return the patient to a normal state of functioning. What happens if "regular life" to such a person has always meant cutting one's arms, or gagging? If this is the case, then the "normal state" that Prozac ushers in is an experience in the surreal, Dali's dripping clock, a disorientation so deep and sweet you spin. Thus Prozac, make no mistake about it, blissed me out and freaked me out and later on, when the full force of health hit me, sometimes stunned me with grief.

Prozac and subsequent selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) drugs have revolutionized treatment of depression and obsessive compulsive disorder in the last decade. No such "blissed-out" state was possible for William Styron, who experienced his episode of severe depressive illness in 1985 after he gave up alcohol. None of the antidepressants then available had any effect on his illness, since he belonged to a medication-resistant minority of the population. A seven-week psychiatric hospitalization—which would not be covered by insurance in today's business-driven medical environment—finally gave him the time and relief from pressure to recover. The trauma of the months of illness also made him a committed spokesperson on mental-illness issues.

He wrote in 1990:

> Psychiatry must be given due credit for its continuing struggle to treat depression pharmacologically. . . . But until that day when a swiftly acting agent is developed, one's faith in a pharmacological cure for major depression must remain provisional. The failure of these pills to act positively and quickly—a defect which is now the general case—is somewhat analogous to the failure of nearly all drugs to stem massive bacterial infections in the years before antibiotics became a specific remedy. And it can be just as dangerous.

The concept of a "high" from a psychiatric drug would have seemed inconceivable to Kay Redfield Jamison, who documents in her 1995 memoir her struggles to accept her illness as a physical condition that, like diabetes, required medication. Although Jamison experienced her first mood swings as an undergraduate in the sixties, and as a clinician and scientist understood the consequences of not taking lithium, she resisted taking medication for many years after her initial diagnosis:

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> Some of my reluctance, no doubt, stemmed from a fundamental denial that what I had was a real disease. This is a common reaction that follows, rather counterintuitively, in the wake of early episodes of manic-depressive illness. Moods are such an essential part of the substance of life, of one's notion of oneself, that even psychotic extremes in mood and behavior somehow can be seen as temporary, even understandable, reactions to what life has dealt. In my case, I had a horrible sense of loss for who I had been and where I had been.

Slater's experience was completely different. In and out of psychiatric hospitals since adolescence, she had almost reached the end of options when she began to take Prozac, the miracle drug with minimal side effects that gave her the ability for the first time to live in the world. She learns to form relationships with people, learns to clean her apartment, lands a job in a literacy center, and eventually returns to school, where she earns a Ph.D. in two years.

Yet the cure that brought her out of the underworld of mental illness proved as devastating to Slater as the disease had to Styron and Jamison. All the comforts of her old life and identity, defined by chronic mental illness, are gone. She experiences the world as "the new, strange planet, pressing in."

For a time she feels ecstatic—almost high, as she says. But about a year after Prozac brings her back into the world, the drug stops working. On a research trip to Kentucky—one of her first trips outside the state of Massachusetts—she finds herself counting, checking, tapping surfaces, and walking backward again. After her doctor ups the dosage of the drug, her dignity is restored, but the drug never works as well as it did initially. This problem, known as "Prozac poop-out," is common, though not dwelled upon in the articles in popular magazines.

Slater writes honestly about the drug's negative side effects. She claims she has never been able to recover her former facility for writing poems and stories, despite Prozac's overall positive effect on her life (and, indeed, she includes in this book a pre-Prozac poem that is stunning). Although no studies have linked Prozac to lessened creativity, one is inclined to trust the accuracy of Slater's reporting on her personal experience.

The drug has also had an adverse effect on her sex life. She is among the 40 percent to 50 percent of patients on Prozac (and other SSRI antidepressants, such as Zoloft and Paxil) who report sexual dysfunction. This latter effect has been so widely reported that the 17.6 million Americans per year who are treated for depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder will understand her attempts to go off the drug, only to come crawling back when she reverts to illness. Slater expresses skepticism about the patients described in the case studies in psychiatrist Peter Kramer's popular book *Listening to Prozac*, which gave rise to the myth that this drug enhances personality and can be used as cosmetic psychopharmacology. Slater and many real-world people I have interviewed in depression-support groups take the drug because they need it, and deal with the unwanted side effects because of the severity and, in many cases, life-threatening nature of the illness.

Slater also raises the question of addiction, the secret fear harbored by most people who take such drugs on a long-term basis. Although she understands the double standard that sanctions insulin for a diabetic but questions the use of Prozac for a depressive, she nevertheless has tried repeatedly and failed to go off the drug.

She writes:

> In the field of drug studies there is considerable debate over terms like addiction and dependence and the delicate distinction between the two. . . . You are an addict, in my mind, if you feel compelled to consistently consume something you wish you wouldn't, and if that something exists outside the basic requirements of your central nervous system. The something can be "good." The something can be "bad." The something can "enlarge" or the something can "diminish." What it measurably does in one's life is less important than one's persistent and uncomfortable sense of servitude or even slavery.

Slater's memoir is an important document in the history of the treatment of mental illness. In an age when some critics complain of a glut of tell-all memoirs, it is important to remember that memoirs are also a respected

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genre that have traditionally given voice to marginalized populations—women, slaves, religious minorities, African Americans, homosexuals. In the stigmatized world of chronic mental illness, the memoir is one of the repositories of history. There are astonishingly few resources about the emotional lives of those who are afflicted by mental illness, or about physiological reactions to the drugs used in treatment, all of which make the memoir a precious source of information to those of us who suffer from such disorders. Slater's blends personal history with scientific and philosophical speculation about the pros and cons of psychotropic drugs—a refreshing change from the public relations brochures distributed by pharmaceutical companies and well-meaning mental health advocacy organizations. It is for those reasons, all literary merit aside, that *Prozac Diary* is one of the most important books of the decade. Fortunately for lovers of literature, Slater also can write. ●

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Xiaorong Li

"Asian Values" and Human Rights

THE EAST ASIAN CHALLENGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Edited by Joanne Bauer and Daniel A. Bell
Cambridge University Press, 1999
394 pp $57.95 $21.95 (paper)

BOOKS ABOUT "Asian values" may seem obsolete these days. What else can be said, when the verdict seems indisputable? Asia's recent financial crisis has discredited the "Asian way" as a hybrid of capitalism and autocracy, which not long ago was championed by some Asian politicians as morally and economically superior to the Western model. Even more important, Asian democrats, human rights activists, and scholars, including some whose essays are under review here, have debunked the idea that there is a set of values that are "Asian" in the sense that they span the continent's diverse cultures.

The idea of "Asian values" may be fading into disrepute, but it has generated debates over a number of compelling issues. As Asian nations pursue economic development, will they necessarily embrace the rule of law and strict standards of government accountability? Do Asians possess cultural resources to draw upon when confronting such problems as social violence? Can traditions of strong familial and community ties inoculate them from some of the negative consequences of a market economy? Can these ties be preserved and nourished in societies that do not respect freedom of association, assembly, worship, and expression? Are there desirable "Asian" formulas for apportioning responsibility between the state and society for providing social security to the unemployed, safeguarding the cultures of minority groups, and protecting women from being abducted and sold into forced marriage, labor, or prostitution? Fifteen authors explore these questions in the collection at hand.

Efforts to identify local traditional roots for embracing human rights norms underpin what Abdullahi A. An-Na'im here calls "the cultural mediation" of human rights. For successful implementation of international norms, human rights have to make sense locally. Two other contributors, Norani Othman and Suwanna Satha-Anand, agree when they describe, in separate essays, how women's rights activists in Malaysia and Thailand have argued for their

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respective causes from within Islamic and Buddhist perspectives. Similarly, members of the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more than fifty years ago claimed a moral agreement among the diverse cultures they represented in condemning crimes against humanity.

But what precisely have these cultures agreed upon and how significant is this agreement for the justification of international human rights? In his essay, Charles Taylor explores the nature and the limits of this agreement. At best, he argues, one can hope for an "overlapping consensus" among different religions about norms of conduct (for example, "Do not torture" and "Do not commit genocide"). The justifications underlying these norms will inevitably vary from one tradition to the next. Less persuasively, Taylor dismisses any realistic chance of (and any need for) a convergence on the legal means for achieving these norms. A distinction between the "levels" of convergence is surely helpful. But Taylor fails to acknowledge that certain legal instruments (such as freedom of speech and immunity from arbitrary trials) might be essential for upholding those basic norms on which there is convergence. The right not to be tortured for one's Buddhist beliefs, for example, cannot be safeguarded without civil-political liberties, particularly in societies where the people worship in different temples. Or, as Amartya Sen has shown, a free press and government accountability is linked to the prevention of famine-induced starvation.

Other contributors, such as An-Na'im and Yash Gai, note that the global market has compelled states to override citizens' rights and liberties in the name of economic competitiveness. When the modern state and a global economy erode traditional social buffers and expose individuals to new sources of indignities and deprivation, people in vulnerable communities look to human rights to protect their material and spiritual well-being. In doing so, local communities draw on indigenous values and norms, as well as practical rational arguments. The double threat from market and state, writes Ghai, makes it ever more critical for workers and other vulnerable social groups to secure protection of their economic rights by supporting an accountable government, a free press, and independent unions that truly represent them.

As these authors try to explain precisely how culture can support local demands for democracy and human rights, they seem to talk past each other, because by "culture" they don't refer to the same thing. For Taylor, "culture" refers to discrete spiritual traditions, whereas for An-Na'im and Ghai, it refers not just to such traditions but also to the emerging practical arguments from local perspectives. The editors of *The East Asian Challenge* could have clarified matters by sorting out these different meanings in their introduction to the volume.

Moreover, the authors give scant thought to the ways in which "local culture," depending on how it is defined, can undermine efforts to implement human rights protections. After all, "local culture" seems most assertive when xenophobic nationalism counters efforts to implement human rights. Nationalist sentiments build on the humiliating experience of Western colonization of Asia in the nineteenth century and seem reinforced by the continent's rapid modernization today, its rising power, and its thirst for advanced technology, investment, and respect from world players. These sentiments were genuinely on display—however authorities may have manipulated them—when Chinese students demonstrated violently in early May to protest NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

Government leaders in China, disciples of the "Asian values" school, dress up xenophobic nationalism as concern for protecting national sovereignty. Thus, any international scrutiny of the way government treats its citizens, such as locking them up for disturbing "public order," becomes interference in a country's "internal affairs." But national sovereignty is hardly an "Asian" value. As Inoue Tatsuo argues in his contribution, those who define sovereignty in this way misappropriate the concept. Sovereignty, as first conceived by Niccolò Machiavelli and Jean Bodin, is a companion to the notion of "human rights." When the modern state eroded the traditional protections (as well as the social tyranny) of churches, guilds, and kinship, it offered to its citizens some form of rights

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protection and equality. The state's own claims to self-determination and equality in international relations were conceptually extrapolated from the rights of individuals. A government that denies its citizens liberty and equality thus undermines its claim to equality among nation-states and freedom from foreign interference.

The "Asian values" advocates have responded that Asian governments are protecting the human rights that really matter— economic rights, which deserve priority over civil-political rights. Even some of their critics, such as Onuma Yasuaki, take this claim for a genuine "East Asian" contribution. In his essay, Yasuaki sees this claim as a correction of the "biased" approach of Western international human rights organizations, which allegedly urge civil-political freedom on poorer countries while refusing to acknowledge their own countries' failures in protecting social-economic rights. But the question is whether citizens' equal rights to basic education and medical care can be safeguarded when they face punishment for speaking freely in public and criticizing government policy.

Advocates of "Asian values" invoked East Asia's economic "miracles" to justify subordinating civil-political rights to economic rights in developing countries. However, aggregate national growth should neither be confused with, nor assumed to go hand in hand with, the protection of economic rights—which, as Tatsuo points out, are intended to safeguard individuals' "fair share of the means for a decent human life." The truth is that Asian governments have largely failed to protect the economic rights of those harmed or left behind by economic transformation. Daniel A. Bell, an editor of *The East Asian Challenge*, suggested in *Dissent* (Summer 1996) that the Singapore government might have been justified, in order to prevent racial violence, in curtailing minorities' social-economic rights, such as the right to live in separate ethnic communities and to teach in their native languages. (The government offered public housing and compulsory education as incentives to shape people's preferences and behavior.) Ghai apparently is not convinced. He points out that the Singapore approach is "closely connected with economic and political controls over the public," and, that the government is "leaving the distribution of resources to rather managed markets," which may have been "managed" with the aim of aiding business, rather than with the aim of protecting people's social-economic rights. Lee Kuan Yew's government has perhaps done better than others in the region to feed, shelter, school, and care for people. But the real issue here is whether it is conceptually misleading to draw an equation between economic rights and welfare that is conditioned on the recipients' political quiescence and self-censorship. In practical terms, it is inhumane to treat people as creatures content with material abundance, cleanliness, order, and efficiency, but incapable of thinking for themselves, taking responsibility as citizens, and making reasonable decisions. "Asian values" based on the Singapore model are a far cry from great Asian civilizations' energy, spontaneity, dynamics, entrepreneurship, and innovative quests for human freedom.

An East Asian challenge for human rights, as the title may suggest, would imply that East Asia—its culture and societies—is unique such that the conception of international human rights does not apply there, or not until it is significantly amended or altered. But one walks away from these essays with the impression that for all the cultural and historical uniqueness of East Asia, most of the problems confronting these societies are similar to those of any transitional societies experiencing the pain of growth. And in the search for humane or less painful solutions, these societies may find that the rest of the world community, particularly those who have paid dearly and developed workable institutions from their own experiences, has much to offer. Human rights and democracy appeal to many Asians because they offer traditionally unavailable protection to vulnerable individuals and endangered communities. In the end, the claim of an East Asian challenge to international human rights seems less substantial than the sense of an East Asia challenged by local demands to incorporate international norms in governance. ●

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The Evil of Banality

Allison Xantha Miller

MONICA'S STORY
by Andrew Morton
St. Martin's Press, 1999
288 pp $24.95

IN SEPTEMBER 1998, when Congress released independent counsel Kenneth Starr's referral to the U.S. House of Representatives, a rivulet of amateur cultural anthropologists and professional literary critics appeared to irrigate the desert of scandal. They were not deterred by the Starr report's evident triviality—accounting for each body part in each liaison and each of the incidental, everyday effects (pet names, gift trinkets, and the like) of the affair between Bill Clinton and former White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Nor did they seem especially frightened by the way important political stuff had brushed up against sticky femininity—you know, feeling-talk, low-cut blouses, dieting, and, oh, just general bourgeois *softness*—that had been polluting our consciousness all summer. After all, this document was a big-time Zeitgeist definer, so commentators took it upon themselves to tell us what was "really" going on here. And to do it, the most with-it of them turned to literary precedent, which the report's scandalous portion, suggestively titled "The Narrative," all but demanded.

These efforts ranged from short "reviews" of the Starr report in magazines and newspapers to roving smart guy Adam Gopnik's three-thousand-word exegesis in the *New Yorker*. There were op-eds and essays, notably by Michiko Kakutani and Stephen Greenblatt in the *New York Times* and James Wood in the *New Republic*. These writers evidently had trouble finding the scandal's exact perfect literary parallel, so they simply tried every one available.

Clinton's words, according to Kakutani, don't "conjure up the elevated world of classical tragedy: Job on the ash-heap, Lear on the heath, Ahab on the quarterdeck." The report, wrote Gopnik, promised to be "a work in the spirit of DeLillo or Ellroy, or even Melville," but turned out like certain works of Harold Brodkey, Truman Capote, and somebody named Joe Gould—"narrow, claustrophobic, and obsessive." Greenblatt was more precise. "The report's closest analog," he wrote, "is not *Tom Jones*, *Lolita* or *The Story of O*. It is the *Malleus Maleficarum*," an Inquisition treatise on witchcraft. Wood pondered Lewinsky's situation: "Disgraced in Washington, she must wander like a lost soul, as Sister Carrie flees to Montreal." Now that clears it all up. Maybe shallow cultural referencing isn't such a Generation X thing after all.

I read *Monica's Story*, by Andrew Morton, the British journalist who wrote *Diana: Her True Story*, because I thought it was the best chance Lewinsky had to come up with her own "character," or to choose whether to present herself as a character at all. I had never read a "quickie" bio before, and I was prepared for the worst. I was not often disappointed.

The events of Monica Lewinsky's first twenty-two years total a mere fifty-four of the book's 288 pages. As hurried as Morton is to get to the good stuff, he manages to portray in these chapters a rather ordinary young woman. I don't mean this at all derogatorily—the most ordinary among us possess some kind of complexity. But the impeachment scandal has largely determined which of her character contradictions are most important. Thus Morton finds within the first few years of Lewinsky's life the qualities that will get her into so much trouble: if you recoiled, for instance, at her obnoxious persistence in secur-

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ing Clinton's help in her job search, you'll find out how at the age of two she refused to get off a swing set till she was good and ready. If you wondered how anyone could have such a low opinion of herself as to seek emotional and sexual security from a totally unavailable man, you can find out how the problems of her weight and diminishing self-esteem were exacerbated by her parents' divorce, when she was fourteen. During college, in fact, she had a disastrous affair with a no-good, engaged and later married older (in his twenties) man who scoped the girls at her high school, where he worked. This affair apparently gave her her notorious sexual confidence. Morton, reflecting his subject's soft-focus romantic idealism, doesn't shy away from the topic, but his language is clumsily, painstakingly demure. At one point the former intern "moistened one of the President's cigars in a most intimate fashion"; even if you've read the Starr report, you may find yourself scratching your head during the sex scenes. With the exception of the pre-Clinton affair, all of Lewinsky's troubles are well within the realm of ordinary problems. Morton, to his credit, realistically criticizes her for hanging on to her neuroses for a little too long: she is "sure of her own mind yet unsure of herself; possessed of a high sense of entitlement but a low sense of self-worth; a girl with a fierce and perverse loyalty to others but little regard for her own survival." Maybe she should have just gotten over herself, but "real" adults are in fact full of such conflicts.

After college, Lewinsky moved to Washington; her mother, Marcia Lewis, thought her daughter might "meet a nice young man." The details of Lewinsky's tenure at the White House are familiar to readers of the Starr report. But perhaps level-headed Lewinsky shunners will be surprised at how easily (and how logically) a crush on the president turned into an obsession. Clinton is a man all but inaccessible, a celebrity, so from the first time she spies him Lewinsky notices how he is dressed, what kind of mood he's in, how he walks. She spends nights reading Gennifer Flowers's autobiography, not in a frenzy, but for fun. Morton writes that she fantasized that the Secret Service would summon her to the Oval Office, "in the same way that Clinton's hero, John F. Kennedy, used the Secret Service to bring women to him during his presidency." After so much buildup, when Clinton does initiate an affair it's almost anticlimactic. The relationship becomes so obvious to White House colleagues that Lewinsky is transferred to the Pentagon in April 1996. "I promise if I win in November I will bring you back here just like that," Clinton says, snapping his fingers. She commits these words and all the other details of the relationship to memory. He calls her frequently for the rest of the year, as "the emotional affinity between them blossomed," and she fully expects to return to the White House.

AT ABOUT this point, Morton indulges an urge to make Lewinsky's life more and more storylike, to offer a counternarrative to the Starr report. At the Pentagon, "the unlovely figure of Linda Tripp began to take control of Monica's life," he writes, veering into the florid melodrama practiced most effectively these days by programs like *Hard Copy*. Tripp, who is called a wicked witch, a Svengali, and a praying mantis in *Monica's Story*, "constantly dangled the rosy-skinned apple of romance in front of a trusting and gullible" Lewinsky, urging her to keep after the president and assuring her that she was "his type." Morton all but accuses Tripp of conspiring with Lucianne Goldberg and Michael Isikoff to entrap Lewinsky into filing a false affidavit in the Paula Jones case, evidently to fulfill Tripp's fantasies of becoming a "player." In any case, it is at Goldberg's behest that Tripp begins taping phone conversations with Lewinsky (and, if you believe the younger woman, doctoring the tapes to incriminate her and the president). The secret taping is such a reprehensible act that I'm inclined to favor Morton's contentions that the tapes actually establish Lewinsky as the author of the "Talking Points" memo and that bringing in Verdon Jordan was either Lewinsky's or Tripp's idea.

Months later, Lewinsky had to go over twenty hours of the tape-recorded calls with a prosecutor from the Office of the Independent Counsel (OIC), correcting the transcript. "There was so much more bullshit there than substance," she tells Morton. "[H]alf the con-

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versations were about diet, shopping, being fat and other stupid stuff. Even the material about the President was just me [whining] away." This was an investigation founded on girl talk, and I wish I could say I don't find that embarrassing.

In fact, are you at all surprised that Monica Lewinsky likes shopping? that she is preoccupied with her weight? that she cries easily? that her favorite color is rose pink? that she expects real-life romance to mirror that in film and fiction? that the movie *Titanic* made her real sad?

Then you won't be surprised that to convey how frightening the months after January 1998 were, Lewinsky and her biographer rely on the symbolism of Woman Imperiled. In a stuffy room in a hotel (adjoining, of all places, a mall), she was held for twelve hours by stone-faced FBI agents, grilled by prosecutors, and threatened with twenty-seven years in prison for perjury. During this scene, which constitutes an entire chapter of *Monica's Story*, the reader skates from one feminine signifier to another—mother love, menacing men, children, religion, shopping, even musical theater; Lewinsky's lawyer finally comes "riding to the rescue." I am ambivalent about melodrama. Mostly I can't stand to be in the same room with it. But I also greatly suspect the college-educated hauteur that requires us to disown as meaningless and hopelessly bourgeois everything tinged with it, especially if it involves women. Reading *Monica's Story*, I found myself wishing events had not happened so extraordinarily, or that Lewinsky and Morton hadn't resorted to clichés to describe them. "Emotionally I was shut down now," Lewinsky says, "like a rape victim who screams for the first five minutes and then just stops. I had closed down."

It seems to me that presenting yourself as a victim—physically weak, emotionally courageous, morally immovable—is a way of appealing for justice that relies heavily on melodramatic rhetoric. Victimology also signals a lack of confidence in the ideal of justice as impartial, automatic, independent of emotional considerations. Instead, you have to sell your case. If, like Lewinsky, you happen to have engaged in less-than-upright behavior in the process of being wronged, you've got to "own" your shortcomings—you must "take responsibility" for your grievance to be redressed.

"Taking responsibility" crops up a lot in *Monica's Story*. "Instead of taking responsibility and acting like a man, [Clinton] lied," Lewinsky says. "I see now [the consequences of] my own actions, so I have to take responsibility for them." Whatever complexity Morton strives for in early chapters gets denuded: if there is real intellectual or emotional reckoning behind Lewinsky's words, it's hard to tell; they seem simply a way of deflecting the criticisms of a judgmental public.

On the other hand, the relentless pressure from Starr's office, combined with the White House's slanderous leaks and the casually gnashing sexism of the media (and, quite often, of Lewinsky's own attorney), was disturbing politically. Morton, however, seems to have encouraged Lewinsky and Lewis to overstate the nature of the harassment, which kept the two women shut up in Watergate at the point of nervous collapse. Morton, Lewinsky, and Lewis liken the experience to Stalinism, Nazism, the pogroms, and "the constant fear and routine repression faced by ethnic minorities in America, particularly the black community." Although these comparisons may not be totally unfounded, they are uninformed, and distance the reader further from understanding Lewinsky's ordeal. It is this distance that has allowed us to ridicule her. I must admit that it was only when I heard her sobbing on the Tripp tapes (which were released *after* the midterm elections in November 1998) that I felt this voyeurism had gone too far. Sometimes extremely annoying people *are* mistreated. This does not make them less annoying; their annoying qualities don't make them any less mistreated.

In the end, I think Lewinsky is reviled less for what she did than for being unworthy of all this attention. No, her life is not novelesque, and fittingly, therefore, neither for the most part is her book, despite its author's attempts. For instance, after her first round of interviews in New York, arranged by Vernon Jordan, she finally came face to face with the reality of leaving Washington. She had been preoccupied with getting a job in the White

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House for the last two years. Sitting in a taxi on the way to the airport, she burst into tears: "Now, seeing another office in another city, and being considered for a wholly new line of work, that hope had finally been extinguished. 'I realized then that no office atmosphere would ever compare to the White House,' she says. 'It was very painful to come to terms with that bitter disappointment.' "

Isn't coming face to face with failure something most of us can relate to? Morton would have been well advised to use the can't-miss technique taught in every first-year fiction workshop: the keenly observed detail. Did the new office lack the telltale eucalyptus scent of the White House? did its carpets feel less plush underfoot? was she used to looking at the photo IDs that hung around people's necks for clues to their status (pink for interns), and now, without them, did she realize she would have to learn a whole new way of relating to people at work? Neither her words—"It was painful"—nor Morton's convey what, exactly, made her cry. Monica Lewinsky is not a character in a novel—we can't get that far inside her head. There are still some details in her life only she knows. Here's to her making enough money from this book to pay her $1 million in legal fees and have a little left over for law-school tuition. I hope she also finds time to pursue her interest in writing poetry. ●

ALLISON XANTHA MILLER is a writer who lives in New York.

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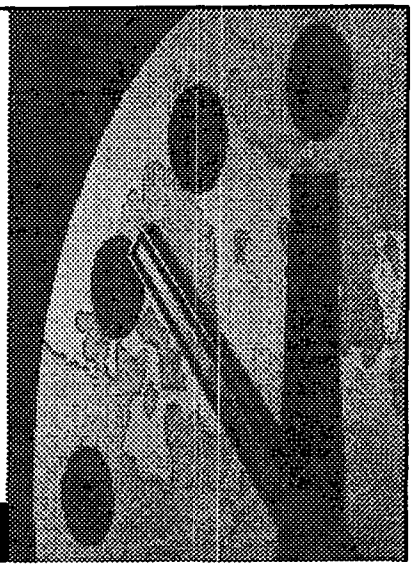

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Providing Platforms or Scaffolds

Editors:

In his article on the revival of the magazine *Transition* (*Dissent*, Spring 1999), John Palattella notes how Lindsay Waters, in an article in *Transition* last year, assailed Richard Rorty's book *Achieving Our Country* on the ground that it "blasphemes the truth of our dreams," managing in the process to pit the author against a "real" [sic] black rapper, Tupac Shakur.

All of this in support of Palattella's thesis that *Transition*'s "devotion to the essay" lies in synthesizing "the incompatible, the disparate, and letting them grow together."

How nice. How sweet. How fair. How open mindedly liberal.

But what about subjects that *Transition* does find so interesting, such as the "engaging" arguments that occurred in the interview by Henry Louis Gates of Louis Farrakhan in its issue 70, where in the course of the interview Farrakhan's patented anti-Semitic vitriol spills forth? How delighted I am, then, to learn that Gates, in his preface to the interview, writes that "Farrakhan really does believe that a cabal of Jews secretly controls the world," and that "apologists and detractors" were then left to "feel free to decide which represente[ed] the 'real' Farrakhan."

My left-leaning instincts are in disarray. Why was the interview even published in *Transition*? What great and good benefit to humanity was achieved by allowing a racist like Farrakhan the chance to vent his disgusting Jew rantings irrespective of the publication's alleged efforts to synthesize the "incompatible" and the "disparate"?

Let us imagine, for a moment, that I am interviewed by *Dissent*, in the course of which I assert that black people are totally inferior in intellect and in reasoning powers, and owe their low status in American society to their inferior inherited characteristics.

Would *Dissent* publish the interview with only an admonition to readers to feel free to decide if my statements represented the "real" me? Would an editor of *Dissent* even be allowed to explain its decision to publish my racist rant under the principle that *Dissent* is so devoted to the essay that it must publish my rantings to demonstrate its desire to synthesize disparate views, allowing them to grow together.

I'll bet.

HENRY J. SHAMES
Santa Barbara, Calif.

John Palattella Replies:

In 1984, Louis Farrakhan volunteered the Nation of Islam's Fruit of Islam to act as a security detail for the presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. During the campaign, Jackson was quoted as referring to New York City as "Hymie Town." Farrakhan complained that Jews control the media. In 1991, the Nation of Islam published *The Secret Relations Between Blacks and Jews*, alleging, among other things, that Jews have trafficked in slavery throughout the centuries.

Henry Louis Gates recounts these and other ugly episodes in the introduction to his interview of Farrakhan in *Transition 70*. Gates's intention is unmistakable: to label the interview "Handle with Care: Combustible Contents."

Why publish such an interview? Perhaps because, as Gates notes in his introduction, Farrakhan holds sway over a few million black followers, especially those who feel vulnerable to charges of disloyalty to the race. Farrakhan is no political pipsqueak, and his ascendance, as Gates notes, is due in part to black churches failing to provide "a moral language in which to address the po-

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litical sins of state-sponsored racial inequality." It's clear from Gates's introduction that neither he nor *Transition* endorses Farrakhan's inflammatory views.

Nonetheless, the magazine rightly felt obliged to understand the source of his broader social appeal and significance. An interview is as good a place to start as any. To my mind, presenting readers with opinions that might run contrary to their own, even opinions readers might find offensive, is a legitimate editorial policy, especially in a journalistic climate like ours, in which the thoughts of politicians, regardless of their race or ideology, are reduced routinely to sound bites. Unlike Mr. Shames, I don't think that ignorance can defeat bigotry.

Why Is NAFTA Bad? I'm Glad You Asked

Editors:

In their article "The Left and Globalization" (*Dissent*, Spring 1999), Alice Amsden and Takashi Hikino assert that progressives are "wise" to call for international capital controls on destabilizing "hot money" and for "managed trade policies characteristic of postwar Bretton Woods arrangements."

Later, they characterize progressive opposition to NAFTA as evidence of a troubling leftist trend toward isolationism, asking, "So, what's so terrible about NAFTA?"

To start, NAFTA disallows international capital controls on destabilizing "hot money" and the ability to conduct managed-trade policies characteristic of postwar Bretton Woods arrangements. Further, although it's true that foreign direct investment is the most dynamic job creator in Mexico today, and that wages paid in foreign-owned plants are generally higher than those in the rest of the economy, this should be put in context. Mexican wages were greatly reduced in the peso crisis of 1994-1995, a crisis facilitated by a development strategy of the Mexican government of which NAFTA was a centerpiece. Also, a large reason that these jobs in foreign-owned plants are substituting for "no jobs at all" is because Mexican agriculture, a large part of the economy, was decimated by imports coming into the country after NAFTA was signed. Granted, the agricultural sector was not a high-wage one, but it did provide employment for many before NAFTA, so jobs in foreign-owned plants don't come at zero opportunity cost.

Last, many progressives oppose NAFTA on more stark political-economic grounds. Its provisions regarding which economic activities are regulated and protected (investor's rights) and which are relegated to weak side agreements (labor standards) make it an epitome of who gets heard in policy debates and who doesn't. This by itself is troubling to many progressives.

It's true that the know-nothing arguments on the opposing side received most of the attention during debate on NAFTA. But, there is an intelligent case to be made against the pact, based in large measure on the arguments employed in Amsden and Hikino's article.

JOSH BIVENS
New York, N.Y.

Alice Amsden and Takashi Hikino Reply:

We agree with Josh Bivens that "an intelligent case can be made against the [NAFTA] pact," but our argument was basically that NAFTA provided Mexican workers with positive gains, which were overlooked by progressives who, as Bivens notes, "oppose NAFTA on more stark political-economic grounds." These "stark" grounds are that NAFTA ignores labor's voice, in a universalistic sense. But, as we also argued, to have included equal labor standards in NAFTA for Mexican and American workers—as progressives demanded—would have jeopardized job creation in Mexico, which is where the action for Mexican workers lies.

Bivens is wrong in saying that NAFTA disallows managed-trade policies. NAFTA is *the* essence of managed trade. NAFTA members have the luxury of a common external tariff against all other countries in the world except each other, and Mexican and American companies don't compete head-on. As for capital controls, NAFTA merely follows rather than makes the international norm.

Try The Taco Stand

Editors:

Rick Perlstein's attempt ("The X-Philes," *Dissent*, Spring 1999) to dismiss Generation X's discontent as just a product of their being in their twenties casts Baby Boomers in a new light. I am in my twenties and my peers make sense to me, unlike the grainy images of youthful sixties hippies cavorting in mud, wearing flowers in their hair, and vandalizing universities. Watching them on any of the hundreds of masturbatory retrospectives devoted to their exuberance fills me with disgust. I mostly hear vapid slogans and tortured Tao from those freaks cum CEOs, who have created the materialistic nation they now disingenuously condemn. I do not know, but maybe the fashion back then was to camouflage a profound mind with an unkempt appearance and dreamy cadence. Or maybe it was just the pot.

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Perlstein ought to applaud Generation X's entrepreneurial impulses, not belittle them; he is an entrepreneur, an author, after all. When he ascribes professional ambition partly to fantasy he misunderstands the relationship between impulse and progress, which is always marked by failures, as is a manuscript, for example. Is not this drive a rational response to a limiting job market, where a Baby Boomer is almost assuredly going to be the one who says, "Sorry, we are not hiring. Try the taco stand"? Thanks, but we do not need the encouragement.

And of course Generation X considers Social Security a joke; they know Baby Boomers do not care one iota what happens after they are gone. That's why they want to gain self-sufficiency as soon as they can, and hope that their parents don't bequeath every last cent to a commune. (Are there any left?)

For many in Generation X the vanity of the sixties is an embarrassment, one barely stomached in dinner table conversation. Baby Boomers announced themselves by rejecting their parents' values and social conventions, and Generation X is ready to do the same. If Tolerant Sixties Radicals—whose opinions Perlstein seems to share—are not pleased, they should blame themselves instead of wondering, "What happened? They had day care."

Generation X's advice to graying Baby Boomers is keep quiet, or we'll put you in a retirement home and take away the television.

PAUL WALLECK
Pasadena, Calif.

Rick Perlstein Replies:

I admit that when I read this letter I was at a loss as to how to respond. My first instinct was to patronize the young man. I'll yield to it. Wear sunscreen. Floss. Stretch. Get plenty of calcium. *Calm down.* And, above all: join us on the left. Baby Boomers cavorted naked in the mud because they could (wouldn't you?). Living in an uninterrupted economic boom, all they needed to secure a lifetime's decent work was finish college and take the flowers out of their hair. Now we find ourselves in another boom—and college graduates fall into nothing but a pit of insecurities. How did this happen? *Conservative politics stole America's decency.* People think that there's a Social Security crisis. There isn't, because dissembling, greedy opportunists made the story up, and there weren't enough people alert enough to notice what was happening and fight back. Let's fight back, on this and a hell of a lot else. Then and only then might our children be blessed with the opportunity to dance naked in the mud when they are young—and afterward, if they choose, get the kind of job that should be every American's birthright: one that delivers a decent minimum of economic and social security. I'm damned proud to be an American entrepreneur. I'd be even prouder—and I'd wager we'd have a whole lot more entrepreneurs—if health insurance here were guaranteed by the government, as it is in every other civilized country in the world, and I didn't have to pay 10 percent of my income to get it. And trust me on the sunscreen.

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COLLECTIVE MEMORY goes up for grabs wherever people suffer from dispossession and feel the call of pride. Memories are not born but made, remade, not natural but "constructed," and like the memorials constructed to overcome memory, they are—and of necessity must be—contested.

Where, I've wondered for some time, is the national museum on slavery? The story of slavery and its sequels is not just a story for blacks, just as the Holocaust is not just a story for Jews. Not long ago, I asked Jürgen Habermas his view of the dispute over a Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The original design by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra envisioned a vast field of spiky stones, a field of thorns. After a demurral from Gerhard Schröder's newly elected social democratic government, along with leaders of Germany's Jews, the field was scaled back and a library of Holocaust archives added. Habermas, a center of moral clarity in Germany for some thirty-five years now, told me that he preferred the original, more drastic design. "It's not for the Jews," he said emphatically. "It's meant to be a thorn in the flesh of the Germans."

A thorn in the flesh of the Germans. Habermas's ripping phrase came back to mind during another recent conversation, this one about the lack of a national museum of the African-American experience. For all the regearing of textbooks in recent years, for all the troubled minds on the question of "whiteness," America strangely lacks a serious, centrally placed museum on slavery, and more generally on the multiple experiences of African Americans. Even Rochester, New York, for many years the dwelling place of Frederick Douglass, and later his burial place, lacks a museum devoted to this exemplary man.

That there is not yet room on the Washington Mall for a thoughtful exploration of the core national trauma is a sign of evasion—white evasion, mainly. No Whitney Museum ejaculations of white guilt, draped as art, can remedy the lack. But whites aren't the only obstacles. Some African Americans have been heard to say that life is hard enough without a vivid display of the brutalities that marked most of the history of the Africans dragged to this continent and the history that befell them here. In 1995, employees of the Library of Congress protested a photographic show, "Back of the Big House: The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation," that documented the buildings where slaves led their lives around the plantation manors, juxtaposing photos to the texts of slave narratives. Employees protested that the show made them feel bad, whereupon squeamish Library administrators took it down. The president of an African-American Cultural Association told a reporter, "An exhibit is supposed to celebrate something positive." The Library also plucked four anti-lynching cartoons out of an exhibit of NAACP graphics, saying the images were "difficult." Since the Smithsonian canceled a Hiroshima memorial show, there's been a panic on in Washington, a flight from exhibits that anyone might disagree with for any reason.

No doubt a museum on slavery and racial oppression would be contentious. No doubt there would be horrendous disputes about just how to tell the frightful story and just how to end it. No doubt other groups would lay their own claims. No doubt a thorn in the flesh is disturbing.

An excess of memory can drive people mad. People, even—or especially—a wronged people, can drown in spiritual irredentism. (Surely Kosovo and the West Bank abundantly illustrate the point.) Forgetfulness has its virtues, as long as what the forgetters agree to forget are grievances that blind them to the legitimate grievances of the other populations. But painful as officially sanctioned memory is, the alternative, a smiley-face theory of history, is worse.

TODD GITLIN

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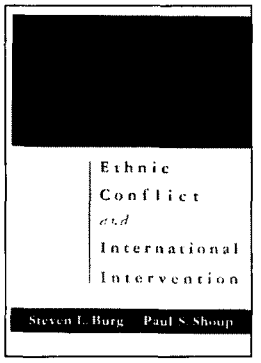

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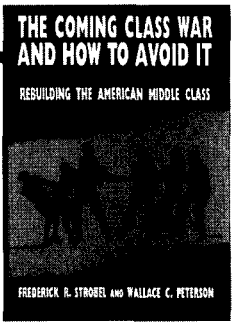
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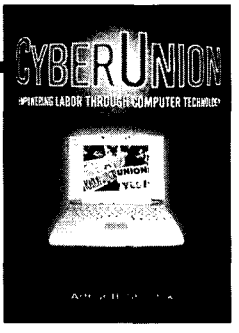

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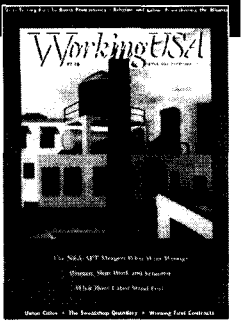

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